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PARTISAN REVIEW

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1951

ARTHUR KOESTLER
The Age of Longing (an excerpt)

DELMORE SCHWARTZ
The Grapes of Crisis

RANDALL JARRELL
The Obscurity of the Poet

WILLIAM PHILLIPS
The Native

VLADIMIR NABOKOV
Exile

IRVING HOWE
The Book of the Grotesque

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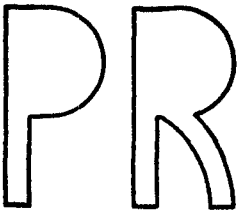

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COMMENT

THE GRAPES OF CRISIS

From knowledge comes suffering.
From suffering comes knowledge.

Generalizations are notoriously easy, false, dangerous, and necessary. It was Oliver Wendell Holmes who declared that "no generalization is entirely true, not even this one," a remark which, like so many witticisms, can be quite misleading, since some generalizations are entirely false, some are false to a large extent, some are true except for a few exceptions, and some are entirely true (for example, the generalization that human beings postpone and procrastinate about tasks which they do not like, or perform these tasks with too much haste and impatience). The few generalizations which I intend to propose are, I think, neither entirely true nor entirely false; and I can only guess about the extent to which they are true. But apart from their truth, they seem to me to be worth examining for the sake of the examples which have suggested them and the further or opposed generalizations which they may suggest to the reader.

TRAGEDY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

The happy ending is no longer fashionable and certainly it is no longer one of the iron laws of the box office. When Edith Wharton's novel, *The Age of Innocence,* was made into a play and produced on Broadway and soon proved to be a failure, William Dean Howells told Mrs. Wharton that what the American public wanted was a tragedy with a happy ending. It is not even perfectly clear that the public wanted a tragedy at all—melodrama probably was as far as the dramatist was supposed to go in the direction of *King Lear* (which was itself revised in the nineteenth century, thus delighting no lesser person than Leo Tolstoy no end). And the hundreds of motion pictures which have had a happy ending as hasty, distasteful, and forced as a shot-gun marriage illustrate the obvious

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truth that the American public as a whole did not like the idea that existence ever arrived at a conclusion which was not full of lasting happiness for everyone except the maiden who has not preserved her virginity for her husband, and the scoundrel who has betrayed everyone, beginning with his mother.

But something has happened—the explicit beginning was probably some time during the second World War—and an unhappy ending has now become a howling success. And it is often also more than an unhappy ending, it is a catastrophe: the sympathetic character with whom the audience or the reader should identify himself concludes in frustration, failure, and whimpering death. This is not at all like the classic conclusion of tragedy, for the death of the hero is not heroic, it does not declare a triumph of the nature of existence over the overweening pride of man, and it is not what Hegel said tragedy was (thinking probably most of all of the *Antigone*), the conflict between two rights (in which one or the other must be violated). The new doom is degrading and disgraceful and humiliating. In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire,* the Southern belle, so often until now a blushing bride at the finish, is dragged away to an insane asylum. In Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky,* the heroine becomes a nymphomaniac in a harem and also concludes as a lunatic. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is an even more pertinent instance because in American life salesmen are not supposed to fail and die, they are supposed to be quite successful, provided, of course, that they are honest and hard-working. And then there is the very different example of T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* in which the only two grim possibilities of existence are a loveless marriage or a martyrdom the very point of which is that the other characters feel that to them it must seem pointless.

That these works should be very successful might be less significant—for of course there have been works which ended in tragedy and were successful—were it not that Hollywood too has sought out the unhappy ending. In one motion picture two representative and popular symbols of the heroic American, Spencer Tracy, for long the rough and ready mechanic, cab driver, and champion of virtue, and James Stewart, the incorruptible Princeton man and Arrow-collar ad, are shot down and die at the end. It is true that they die for the sake of getting rubber from the Japanese in the midst of the

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war in the Pacific. And Spencer Tracy has been guilty of grave crimes and imprisoned in Alcatraz before being given a chance to sacrifice his life for his country. But in the past, death was unnecessary in Hollywood and the hero who saved his country was decorated at the end of the picture by the President of the United States, while the lovable and heroic gangster was sometimes permitted to reform and become a junior executive.

So too in John Ford's film, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home,* the hero is prevented from being heroic by his excellence as a teacher of aerial gunnery in a training camp. He succeeds in escaping the bondage and penalty of his pedagogic talent only because another soldier has suddenly had an attack of acute appendicitis, and he performs heroic exploits—which, it is loudly implied, have done much to defeat Nazi Germany—largely through a series of accidents and weaknesses, such as falling asleep at the wrong time and getting drunk when he did not want a drink. He is rewarded for his feats by being sent to a psychiatric ward: all his efforts to explain himself are frustrated by high-ranking generals who insist on forcing him to drink more alcohol so that he will regain his senses, and when he escapes from the psychiatric ward, he has to climb back into his own home in the early morning like a burglar, which is what his father supposes him to be, clouting his son into unconsciousness with a monkey wrench as he comes through the kitchen window and refusing to believe any part of his son's account of his heroism except for the visit to the psychiatric ward. At the very end of the picture, there occurs the traditional decoration of the hero by high-ranking officials, but only after many reels in which the most holy sanctions and mores of America have been made the butts of scorn, slapstick, satire, and in short the most merciless comic rejection.

From Hollywood to modern poetry is an enormous jump, but since we are all involved with one another and in the same endangered boat, poetry can also be a good index of the climate of society. As R. P. Blackmur remarked in *Partisan Review's* symposium on the state of American writing, Robert Lowell called his book of poems *Lord Weary's Castle,* Randall Jarrell his, *Losses,* and John Berryman his, *The Dispossessed* (Saul Bellow's second novel is named *The Victim,* Isaac Rosenfeld's first novel *Passage From Home,* and Hemingway's latest novel derives its title from Stonewall Jackson's dying

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words). A quotation from Berryman's book will show one basis in reality for the attitudes which these authors bring forward as keys to their work:

The approaching television of baseball.
The King approaching Quebec. Cotton down.
Skirts up. Four persons shot. Advertisements.
Twenty-six policemen are decorated.
Mother's Day repercussions. A film star
Hopes marriage will preserve him from his fans.

News of one day, one afternoon, one time.
If it were possible to take these things
Quite seriously, I believe they might
Curry disorder in the strongest brain,
Immobilize the most resilient will,
Stop trains, break up the city's food supply,
And perfectly demoralize the nation.

Berryman's poem was written in 1939, which means that his lines were prophetic: F. Scott Fitzgerald's description of his nervous breakdown in *The Crack-Up* has just gone into a new edition and Budd Schulberg's novel about him, *The Disenchanted,* is a best seller which contains such remarks as "Nothing fails like success" and "You never get a second chance. There is only one chance."

DAISY MILLER HAS BECOME CYNICAL

The beautiful innocence and goodness of the American girl which fascinated Henry James so much and inspired the creation of such characters as Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer has always been an important part of the American credo. It is embodied in the legal principle that everyone is innocent until proven guilty—which does not hold in Mediterranean nations—and it may have much to do with the disbelief, before and after two trials, in the guilt of Alger Hiss. But the truly glamorous modern heroine begins with cynicism and self-doubt as we can see in the fiction of Mary McCarthy, Carson McCullers, and Jean Stafford. Starting with the habit of distrust, she rapidly arrives at a seduction on a Pullman, a desire to know all the four-letter words, or a marriage which is contracted with the

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reservation that it can be terminated by divorce. Daisy Miller was a misunderstood virgin, and her modern granddaughter is a self-confessed nymphomaniac who insists that promiscuity is a civil liberty, or perhaps one of the rights secured through woman's suffrage. And if she is reproached for being suspicious of men and of existence, she answers that she is really being "realistic," or motivated by honesty, candor, and intelligence.

One reason for the character of the modern heroine is obviously the revolution in sexual mores which has occurred and continued since the first World War. Another reason is the natural delight a woman may enjoy in undressing and the equal pleasure of the reader in looking at her as she takes off all her clothes. It was possible for the hero of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel to feel damned forever because he had slept with a chorus girl, and the popular success of Fitzgerald's early work was partly based on curiosity, to the point of fascination, in reading about necking parties. But the radical shift in sexual morality and the ubiquity of the peeping Tom are hardly the whole story.

THE PSYCHIATRIST AS HERO

T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* invoked Tiresias, the priest and seer, to judge the act of making love. Twenty-six years after, in *The Cocktail Party,* his priest and seer must play the part, or use the methods of a psychiatrist, in order to judge three love affairs and an unhappy marriage. There are two more Broadway plays and innumerable films in which the psychiatrist is a supreme judge and healer. At the same time the vocabulary of psychoanalysis dominates ordinary conversation. People are now "neurotic," not unhappy, personal relationships are full of "tensions," "resentments," and "insecurity"; an intimate friendship is interpreted as the result of "identification" with a father image or a mother image when it is not suspected of being "repressed homosexuality." Human beings are not said to be evil and immoral, but "destructive," "narcissistic," "infantile" or "regressive," while being good is described as being "normal," "functioning well," "being mature," or "adjusted." Guilt and self-accusation are more popular and more voluble than they have ever been except in Dostoevsky's fiction. This fondness for a

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medical terminology may have begun merely as another manifestation of the love of new jargons, and it is probably true that Clara Bow's sexual allure was called "It" because scenario writers had heard about Freud's concept of the Id. But it is no longer merely a vogue, it is a vision, however distorted and poorly understood, of human nature and human relationships, which reached a hilarious peak at that moment in a film when Betty Grable, Clara Bow's apostolic successor, successfully explained her husband's trials and difficulties as caused by the fact that her father-in-law was her husband's Super-Ego!

THE MOUNTING AND ENDLESS CRISIS

Clearly the social origins of the sense of crisis which shows itself in so many different ways must include the depression, the two World Wars and the fear of a third war with Russia. If one has expected pie or at least manna in the sky, the dropping of atom bombs becomes an apocalyptic transformation of the blue. And if one expected to be rich and successful, two luxurious promises of the American Dream, one can hardly help but be terrified when riches and success bring greater conflict and unhappiness, instead of gratification and peace. To have hopes which may be disappointed is a possibility which one naturally envisages and for which one has braced oneself. But to find that the overwhelming fulfillment of hope and desire leave one in disillusion or despair is one of the most demoralizing of experiences. It is unexpected, and one cannot be prepared for it. The fact is that one has been prepared against it in the sense that virtue was always supposed to triumph, wickedness was to be punished, and after the struggle against the powers of evil concluded in an inevitable victory, one was supposed to be happy in this life and even more happy in the next one. The first World War was supposed to end all wars; the second World War was viewed with more skepticism, but still it was supposed to secure peace for a long period of time, and victory was supposed to bring with it the annihilation of totalitarian regimes.[1] But the postwar period quickly assumed the appearance and generated the atmosphere of a new pre-war period.

1. "We are all the last generation," Adolf Hitler might have remarked to Gertrude Stein or Pablo Picasso in Paris in May, 1940. Gertrude Stein said to Hemingway after the first World War: "You are all a lost generation."

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The international crisis affects the life of the individual in a hundred thousand ways, whether through housing shortages, inflation, or uncertainty and fear of the future. And this was true even before many people understood Russia's foreign policy (it is not wholly clear that anyone really understands it, not even the Politburo), for the crowds in Times Square on V-J day looked lost, instead of jubilant; they looked as if they were not sure what emotion would be appropriate to victory, or certain that they were victorious. In the same way it was natural and naive to suppose that the defeat of Hitler would end or reduce the infamy of racial discrimination, instead of intensifying it and bringing a greater consciousness and self-consciousness of it, so that, for example, New York Jews are accused by Jews elsewhere of being the cause of anti-Semitism. And the phenomenon of racial discrimination has itself become a leading theme of novels and films.

"THE COLD MEDUSA-FACE OF LIFE"[2]

It is a truism that the great problems of an age are reflected in works of literature, and that the authors of fiction may be inspired by a desire to cope with them or to identify their personal problems with the immediate problems of society. What is less likely and what requires explanation is a profound modification in the ways of attempting to deal with contemporary problems through the medium of creative works. The unhappy ending can serve as a symbol of the radical change which has occurred since William Dean Howells remarked upon the kind of tragedy which Americans wanted. Eugene O'Neill's plays were full of unhappiness and they were successful, but a fair proportion of the audience felt that there was something strange in enjoying the spectacle of agony, and one representative comment about any such play was: "Life is awful enough; when I go to the theater I want to forget about all that is awful, I don't want to be reminded of it." No one now makes such remarks about Arthur

2. This phrase of Henry James, and its significant context, is quoted in F. W. Dupee's forthcoming book on James, and there the context can be examined in detail. James as an author is an important witness of the thesis of this essay. He was the first victim of mass-culture for he tried harder and harder to become popular and the harder he tried, the more unpopular, and the better, he became; and some thirty years after his death he has become the most popular and the most famous of classic American authors, as the dramatization of *The Ambassadors* on television demonstrates.

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Miller's *Death of a Salesman* or Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

The new technique consists in a confrontation of all that may be wrong, where in the past escape from evil or the denial of evil prevailed. There were exceptions, of course, and of course the literature of Europe always depended upon the resolutions of tragedy. But in America since the Gilded Age, happiness was required, as if, one must suppose, the mere imaginative declaration of the happy ending would help to make life itself a more successful affair. It was wrong to be pessimistic, disillusioned, or even gloomy, and it was right and American to be optimistic, to be a booster, and to have fabulous expectations. The shift is not a complete one, nor is it a mechanical shift from affirmation to despair, and we can only speculate, we are still too much in the midst of it, about the nature of the change, its permanence, and its essential quality. We can guess hopefully that perhaps Americans no longer want to be children and they no longer want to be told fairy tales: they are mature enough to want the confrontation of reality which tragedy provides. Or we can suppose that there is so much disruption about us and the sense of crisis is so intense that an unhappy ending makes possible purgation and relief. Misery loves company and desperation is reduced by a scrutiny of how much more terrifying the situation of other human beings may be when compared to one's own situation. In a period of depression, the image of a Utopia is welcome; but when civilization itself seems capable of destroying itself and when the end of the crisis does not seem likely tomorrow, it is a genuine relief and blessing to be able to contemplate images of the worst that may happen.

Whatever the explanation of the change, and there are of course other possible explanations, it is certainly true that the conditions under which a serious literature can thrive have been advanced in this one important respect. In other important ways there has been a deterioration, but the sole repeal of the dogma that the attitudes of the author must be optimistic, cheerful, and affirmative, at all costs, creates the possibility of a genuine tragic art. Nobility is quickened by tragedy and nurtured by necessity. Once the mind is capable of regarding the future with a sense of tragedy and a sense of comedy, instead of requiring the forced smiles (and the whistling in the dark) of dogmatic optimism, the awakened consciousness is prepared to respond to existence with courage and intelligence.

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F. Scott Fitzgerald was a hero and nothing less than everything can have been the cause of his tragic suffering. He embraced the myths of American life with a love, a daring, and a gaiety which now make his own life a tragic myth, a fate which he himself must have sensed when he said: "Show me a hero and I'll show you a tragedy." The elegy which John Peale Bishop wrote about Fitzgerald's death declares his tragic heroism:

None had such promise then, and none
Your scapegrace wit or your disarming grace;
For you were bold as was Danaë's son,
Conceived like Perseus in a dream of gold.
And there was none when you were young, not one,
So prompt in the reflecting shield to trace
The glittering aspect of a Gorgon age.

To think of the future is to think of a myth, a myth in which we can all believe. And the past is spellbound by myths like bad dreams, myths which link a modern American novelist with the inexhaustible stories of the ancients. When the author of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Last Tycoon* is compared to Perseus, we remember that Perseus was commanded to be a hero and to prove himself one by destroying the Gorgon, Medusa. Anyone who looked at the face of the Medusa was instantly turned to stone. But with his curved sword, with the brazen shield Hermes had given him and guided by Athena, Perseus stood with his back to the monstrous being, caught her image in his shining shield and cut off her head, immediately after which a winged horse, Pegasus, sprang from her headless body. If Perseus had not succeeded in beheading the Medusa, he would have failed to be a hero. If he had not gazed at her indirectly, he would have turned to stone. It is still necessary to stare at the Medusa before we turn to stone.

Delmore Schwartz

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Arthur Koestler

FATIGUE OF THE SYNAPSES*

Leo Nikolayevich Leontiev had been struggling for three hours to write the eight hundred words of the cabled version of his speech destined for home consumption. To reach the deadline of the next Friday issue of "Freedom and Culture," the text of the cable had to be delivered by 8 p.m. at the latest to the office of the Commonwealth Government's official News Agency. It was now 6 p.m., and the Agency had already twice telephoned for the text. Leontiev had two hours left to write it and to change for the reception which Monsieur Anatole was giving in his honor. He rose impatiently and crossed the soft carpet to the French window.

The hotel was one of the famed old buildings in a side street from the Rue de Rivoli, and the windows of his suite overlooked the Place Vendôme. The square looked even more solid and restful than usual at this late afternoon hour of a hot summer day. It had con-tinuity, as his old friend Monsieur Anatole would say. Leontiev tried to recall the sight of the slums of Belleville as an antidote, but did not succeed. The image that appeared before his mind's eye was that of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

He went back to the graceful Regency desk and started once again on his labors. The trouble was that it was not enough to trans-

* This is a chapter from *The Age of Longing* (to be published by Macmillan in March), the action of which takes place in the middle 1950's. "It is not," Koestler says in the preface, "a visionary tale of the future; it merely takes the present one step further in time." The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has changed its name to "Commonwealth of Freedom-Loving People" by decree of the Marshal of Peace. Hero of Culture and Joy of the People, Leo Nikolayevich Leontiev, poet laureate of the Commonwealth, has come to Paris as star delegate of the Rally for Peace and Progress.

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late the text of the speech into the ritual terminology, the rigid, Byzantine, catechismal style required for home consumption. He had to produce an entirely different text with an almost opposite message which, however, did not show any direct, open contradiction to the original, and which, moreover, preserved some of his original phrases as connecting links. He started on this task for the sixth or seventh time; and again at the first phrase he got stuck at a preposition, crossed it out, replaced it, got involved with the syntax and had to erase the whole sentence. This had now been going on since three o'clock.

He knew the symptoms well. Professor Gruber had called them "fatigue of the synapses." The synapses were the junctions between brain cells, across which the nervous impulse had to pass. There were millions of them in the brain. Sometimes something went wrong at these junctions; the impulse could not pass and certain thoughts and actions were blocked. The cause of this, according to Gruber, was certain toxic substances produced by fatigue, which accumulated at the synapses and paralysed their action. These toxic chemicals, then, had the power to block thought, or certain kinds of thought. Other toxic substances, of course, had the opposite effect, as Gruber had patiently explained. They reduced the normal resistance at the junctions, so that channels of thought were thrown wide open, which in a well-regulated brain remained prudently and mercifully closed. Liquor was a relatively harmless substance of this kind. But there were others, less harmless, capable of rearranging the whole hierarchy of brain junctions, so that channels normally open were closed, and those normally closed were opened. It was amusing, Gruber had explained, growing lyrical, what you could do with a man in that state. You could make him believe the weirdest things if you only hammered it in with sufficient intensity; you could make him believe that he was Caesar or Brutus, a hero or a criminal—provided of course that he had some potential inclination, within the normally blocked channels of his mind, to become either of them. But then, who hadn't? Who of us hasn't killed his Mandarin?

"What's that?" Leontiev had asked absent-mindedly. And Gruber, who on that evening had been curiously excited and talkative, as if he himself were under the influence of a drug, had explained:

"It is a psychological test invented by some French wit. If you

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could become rich by pressing a button with the result of killing a Mandarin in China whom you had never seen, and without anybody ever knowing about it—would you do it or not . . . ? Needless to say, every one of us has, on some occasion, killed a Mandarin in his thoughts. . . . " Gruber had paused, then continued with a kind of suppressed enthusiasm in his voice:

"But now listen. The beauty of playing about with the synapses is that we have discovered methods whereby we can make a man believe that he has *really* killed his Mandarin and confess with earnest conviction that the victim had a gold crown in his left upper molar, that he had met him at such-and-such a place, at such-and-such an hour, and killed him in such-and-such a way with the help of X, Y and Z, who were his accomplices. . . . Damn it all, if we were allowed to publish our results, our colleagues at the American universities would realize that we are ten years ahead of them."

Gruber had shut up abruptly and there was a silence during which, as it so often happened at that time and in that country, the listener realized that the speaker had realized that he had said something which should have remained unsaid. Their thoughts echoed each other's, and each silent rebound reinforced their apprehension. They were about the same age, both in their early fifties; but Leontiev with his sturdy build and military countenance looked about ten years younger than the Professor. The latter was completely bald, held his head cocked to one side like a bird, fidgeted incessantly, and had such a jerky way of moving about that Leontiev wouldn't have been surprised if Gruber had suddenly jumped to the top of the cupboard and continued the conversation with his feet dangling from it—as in fact he had been in the habit of doing in their student days.

The two men had been on friendly terms at the University, then they had drifted apart and for the last twenty years Leontiev had completely lost sight of Gruber. But everybody else had also lost sight of Gruber at that time; he seemed to have vanished from circulation. The last paper he had published, on the effects of two little-known exotic drugs, had created a minor sensation in academic circles. Gruber and his associate, another young psychiatrist, had studied the effects of the drugs on themselves in a series of experiments over a period of three months. It was rumored that they had both become addicts, and a few months after they published their paper, Gruber's

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associate shot himself. Shortly afterward Gruber had left the capital—some said to undergo a cure, others that he had been mobilized for some research job with the army. There were more rumors, followed by some discouraging hints from the proper quarters which had the required effect: Gruber's name was no longer mentioned either in public or in private, and was soon conveniently forgotten. It had cropped up, quite unexpectedly, a few weeks before Leontiev's journey to Paris when, at the end of some official banquet, he had complained to an old friend about his growing inability to work, and his apprehensions of a nervous breakdown. This friend belonged to the inner circle of the ruling hierarchy, but it was rumored that he had fallen in disfavor: at the last May Day parade he was not seen on the official stand, his name had vanished from the newspapers and his demotion seemed imminent. On that evening he had been fairly drunk and had grinned at Leontiev with sympathy: "So you are cracking up, eh?" he said. "Why don't you consult Gruber?"

Leontiev, who could not have survived thirty years of campaigning on the cultural front had he not acquired a perfect control of his reactions, nodded absently, but on second thoughts he thought it proper to express mild surprise. "Gruber?" he said. "Oh yes. I didn't know that he was—available."

His friend grinned even more. "You did not know, eh? How are you going to write the chronicle of our times if you know nothing about Gruber?" Then he stopped grinning, conscious of somebody's gaze alighting on them. He added indifferently: "No, he is not available—only in exceptional cases. But I guess a Hero of Culture and Joy of the People qualifies as an exceptional case. I'll see what I can do. He will either come and see you tomorrow, or you had better forget that I mentioned him."

The next day Gruber, in an enormous limousine, had turned up at Leontiev's country house; had taken an appreciative look at the tennis court and swimming pool; had put his stethoscope in a perfunctory way to Leontiev's chest—all this in a manner as if they had only parted yesterday—and a little later on, over a bottle of Burgundy in Leontiev's study, had explained to him about "the fatigue of the synapses." Then, carried away by the subject, or by the unusually heavy Burgundy, or by the gap of twenty years since their last encounter, he had begun to talk about the chemical reconditioning of

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the mind, the means of injecting a sense of guilt into a man's veins with a sterilized needle, of grafting a criminal past into him as one grafts a bone-flap onto a fractured skull.

"The funny thing is," he had said with a sudden boyish giggle which stood in unpleasant contrast to the aging bald man's face, "that though we are not allowed to publish our results, they have in fact been the most publicized news in our time." Then another of those abrupt silences had descended between them in which each weighed the consequences of having read the other's thoughts. "Of course you understand that it was all a joke—a fantasy. I was pulling your leg," said Gruber.

"Of course," said Leontiev, smiling with his famous blue stare straight into the other's eyes. "You always used to pull our legs, even as a student. But what I wanted to ask . . . Can you somehow unblock this—this fatigue of the synapses, in regard to my writing?"

"Hm," said the Professor. "It depends. Science is not magic. I cannot invent your Mandarin; that's your job. I must have something to build on—something real, even if it is only ten per cent of the goods to be delivered. That's what I have always tried to impress on these blockheads of ours."

"I don't follow you," said Leontiev.

"Don't you? I thought you knew the elements. . . . After all, you are a writer—a profession which is supposed to require some imagination." He became irritated, started fidgeting again on his chair. With his egg-shaped skull and frail, thin body, he gave Leontiev the impression of an oversized, aged embryo—except for some irritating detail which he could not define. Now suddenly he found out what it was: the bald Gruber's eyebrows were dyed black, and these dyed eyebrows had an extraordinary mobility.

"You must be a little more explicit," said Leontiev.

"Explicit?" The Professor giggled. "My poor friend, that is the last thing you should ask for, (a) as an artist, (b) in view of the particular circumstances of our age and time. . . ." He frowned; then shrugged; then seemed to have made his mind up. "All right," he said. "If you really want me to help you. How is Zina?" he asked abruptly.

"She is fine. We have no chldren, you know."

"How old is she now?"

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"Nearing fifty. Still pretty. At least *I* think so."

"Always devoted to each other like two turtle doves?"

Leontiev smiled. "You are not married."

"Not in my line. . . . "

There was a silence. Suddenly the Professor asked in a casual tone: "Why don't you clear out?"

At first Leontiev thought that he had not heard well; then he composed his features and put on the stern, bushy-eyebrow look which made people like the poet Navarin change their color.

"I haven't understood you—at least I hope so," he said gravely.

"All right, all right, cut it out. As soon as I leave, you can rush to the telephone and denounce me. I shall then say that I have deliberately tried to provoke you. Maybe that's what I am doing, who knows? Anyway, you are one of the few who are allowed from time to time to go abroad to congresses and whatnots. But of course each time you have to leave Zina behind as a hostage. Hence the choice before you is: to sacrifice Zina or to go on sacrificing art, truth, integrity, et cetera. Personally I don't know what art, truth, integrity, et cetera, mean—not in my line. But I know that to some people they mean something—enough to make the synapses go haywire in conflicts of this kind. . . . Now, I have watched your reactions—I bet you imagine you have what people call 'an inscrutable face'—so I know that although you long to clear out, and write the one honest book of your life, you are too much of a moral coward to let Zina end her days north of the Arctic Circle for the sake of Honesty, Truth and so on. . . . Shut up," he screamed suddenly, as Leontiev tried to interrupt him, "shut up and let me finish first. You wanted me to be explicit, didn't you? . . . Anyway, solution number one has to be eliminated because of your sentimental attachment to Zina. The other solution is much more complicated. You have difficulties in writing; these difficulties will increase gradually; soon you will be entirely blocked. Nobody can go on raping his conscience indefinitely. I use 'conscience' as a shorthand expression though it isn't in my line; what I mean is a given pattern of conditioning. You can go against it for a while, even for years, but it requires more and more effort, and once the toxic fatigue-products begin to accumulate, you are done for. The only way out is to alter the pattern through reconditioning. I have done that successfully in a number of cases—but there the

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required effect was rather the opposite to that in your case. . . . " He giggled. "Unless you fancy the part of a Christian martyr—that I can do for you without difficulty. . . . "

"You are talking utter mad, criminal nonsense," said Leontiev with dignity. "Now I must beg you. . . ."

"That's right. It was a perfect line. Just the correct words. Now listen. Why am I taking such an interest in you? Answer the question for yourself. I never liked you particularly, and since we last met you have become a pompous ass. But I never had a chance of trying my hand on a case like yours. And my work is beginning to bore me—always the same monotonous job. In your case the method and aim would be just the opposite. I feel a kind of creative itch; I have a feeling that I could not only remove your inhibitory blocks but make you write a real masterpiece within the strict limits of orthodoxy. That may sound a little fantastic to you, but after all the performances of our self-styled Mandarin-killers were no less fantastic. . . . "

"Assuming," said Leontiev, "that I gave the slightest credence to your mad and treasonable fantasies—which I do not—let me ask for curiosity's sake how you would set about it?"

Gruber laughed and, reaching across the table, patted Leontiev's shoulder. "Perfect," he giggled. "You are the most perfect ham actor I have seen. . . . Now to the method. It is fantastically simple. I can put it into one phrase." He paused, then said with emphasis:

"I will make you believe in what you write."

There was a silence. Leontiev was on the point of saying "How dare you" in a majestic voice; then he gave up. They had now both gone too far. They had delivered themselves into each other's hands; his tension snapped and suddenly he didn't care any longer. Instead of "How dare you," he said with a tired smile: "And how are you going to do that?"

"Ah," said Gruber. "There is a good boy. It is less difficult than you imagine. All I need is, as I said before, something real to build on. You remember old Archimedes: Give me one firm spot on which to stand and I will move the earth. After all there must be *something* in which you still believe. . . . Let's see. You believe in the storming of Bastilles? Good. In the Barricades of 1848? In the Commune of 1871? In the Proclamation of 1917? Better and better. Now I see the pattern. You believe that basically all our premises were right, and

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that at a certain point, by sheer accident of persons and circumstances things began to go wrong. Well, if you believe that, you are not a difficult case. All you need is to be made to see that everything that happened happened not by accident but by necessity; and that consequently if our premises were right, the outcome must be the will of History which, *ex hypothesi,* is always right. It's perfectly simple, isn't it?"

"Perfectly."

"Only you don't believe a word of it. It will be my job to persuade you."

"How? With syringes and pills?"

"Mostly by arguments. The arguments will be a little repetitive and may involve a certain amount of bullying—that's part of the reconditioning therapy. The bullying is designed to abolish the main source of resistance—your notions of self-respect and so on. The chemical paraphernalia serve merely the purpose of making you more receptive to the arguments by opening certain channels and blocking others. After a few weeks at the utmost, the whole layout of your brain will be altered as thoroughly as the map of Europe after the last war. You will believe everything you write, and you will write with conviction and gusto as befits a Hero of Culture. . . . "

There was a pause. Leontiev said:

"You are right: it is perfectly simple. And perfectly disgusting."

"Of course. Nothing more disgusting than to watch a film actress having her beauty treatment—the slapping of the grease-covered face, the lifting of the bosom, the curling of the locks in the electric machine. But the result is a dazzling sight, and the procedure only seems disgusting to those who entertain naive illusions about the body. My proposal is disgusting to you because you have equally naive illusions about the working of the mind."

"Maybe. But I won't do it."

"I thought so. Bad luck for me, worse for you. I miss an experiment, you miss a unique chance to become the first synthetic writer in history. But I never had any luck in persuading patients to submit to voluntary treatment—not even members of the 'Fearless Sufferers.' Maybe I shall have to have you locked up for our mutual benefit, and that of the reading public."

"I would not be surprised if you did," said Leontiev.

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"We are both past the age where anything surprises us. Nevertheless I am surprised at something I have discovered about you. You are, as I said, a pompous ass, a ham and a ruthless scoundrel. But for all that you have a curious kind of innocence. . . . One night during the great famine, in a town infested by hoardes of waifs and strays, I stepped on a child sleeping rolled up in a doorway. It was a girl of eight or nine; she woke up, rubbed her eyes, made me a proposal in words which would make a corporal blush, and then continued in the same sleepy voice: 'All right, uncle, if you don't want to, you could at least tell me a fairy story' . . . You have this same naiveté of a corrupt child."

They had talked on for a little while, then Gruber had left. Leontiev could still see him waving good-by, his bald head stuck out of the window of the big black limousine, agitating his dyed eyebrows like a clown.

Leontiev tore the paper up with resignation, went back to the window and looked down at the restful square, his fists jammed into the pockets of his dressing-gown. It was a blue flannel dressing-gown which Zina had given him on the tenth anniversary of their marriage, nearly twenty years ago. He had worn it ever since at work, and it had become such a habit that by now he felt himself quite unable to write in any other attire. A classic example of conditioning, Gruber would say. Also, for the last twenty years whenever Zina had come into his study and seen him standing at the window—with his fists jammed into the pockets of the dressing-gown, his legs apart and his shoulders squared, he gave the impression of a Cossack headman gazing out into the steppe—she would invariably say, in her soft Ukrainian singsong: "Don't strain the pockets so, Lyovochka, it makes them bulge." At first this had made him furious; then it had become an essential ritual of his working day—another conditioned reflex, in Gruber's terms. The "study" had at first been a corner of their kitchen-bed-sitting-room, partitioned off by a sheet; then a tiny, former maid's room in a shared communal flat; finally a huge library in their country house, complete with Bokhara carpets and goldfish bowls. But the dressing-gown had remained the same, and Zina's soft inflection had remained the same, and for all he knew the soft curves of her body too—for she was a Ukrainian peasant girl, passionate but

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modest, who in the thirty years of their marriage had never shown herself to him in the nude. He knew her body like a blind man, only by touch; its gentle curves, and the languid rhythm of her movements in the dark had always appeared to him like an echo of the lilting singsong of her voice. Just now he would have given anything to hear her open the door behind him and say, with a resigned, absent-minded sigh: Don't strain the pockets, Lyovochka. . . . He was sure it would do the trick and enable him to finish the revised version of his speech.

It was almost seven; he had only an hour left. If he pretended to be sick he would have to notify the Cultural Attaché, and they would at once send the Embassy doctor. A man could fake any emotion or belief, but not a cold, not even an indigestion or a serious headache. Which went to prove the correctness of a philosophy which took only the body seriously and had destroyed the very notion of a hypothetical mind. Though, if Gruber was to be believed, the mind could nevertheless directly affect the body by producing the famous fatigue of the synapses. At present he felt as if a whole drugstore of poison were working at them—the accumulated toxins of thirty years. Yet to pretend sickness would inevitably arouse suspicion—they had a sixth sense for that kind of thing. He could of course get away with it, but it would be entered as an item on the debit side of the book and one could never know for certain what one's balance-sheet looked like; how much credit one had left, where the overdraft began; it was a peculiarity of the system that once one had overdrawn, one was never given a chance to redress the balance. Besides, if he reported sick, he could not go to Monsieur Anatole's reception. And the prospect of visiting Monsieur Anatole again had been the one bright spot in this whole trip. He felt an almost physical longing to see people move about at a party without squinting over their shoulders at invisible shadows; to hear them chattering frivolously, irreverently, irresponsibly—not for the record, not in the desperate hope of improving the unknown balance-sheet, but for the sole purpose of exercising their wits and vocal chords. He himself of course could take no part in all that; he would have to pose, as always, for his own statue, looking at them from under bushy eyebrows, the martial image of a Hero of Culture. But he would nevertheless hear them talk and see them move about, gossip, laugh and munch sandwiches at their ease. The

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last time he was allowed abroad had been five years ago; the next time would probably never be. He needed an evening like that, just one evening like that, more than he needed anything in life. He could only go to Monsieur Anatole's if he finished the cable. Well then, he was going to finish it, even if all the synapses burst under the strain. Let them burst. . . .

His clenched fists were straining against the lining of the pockets. He turned round to go back to the desk. Suddenly he felt something give way under the tense downward pressure of his right fist. The strain had been too much for the dressing-gown; the seam of the right pocket had burst open. In twenty years this had never happened before. He looked at the loose, torn pocket in alarm verging on panic, and at the same moment heard the telephone ring. He covered the pocket with his hand, like a wound, and lifted the receiver. The deferential voice of the hall porter announced that there was a messenger downstairs who insisted on seeing him personally about a cable. "Tell him to wait," said Leontiev. "The cable will be ready in half an hour." "Yes, sir," said the porter, "what cable, sir? He says he has got a cable on him and that he has been told to deliver it personally."

For a second Leontiev's mind did not connect. Then he told the porter to send the messenger up; then hesitated. "Yes, sir. Anything else, sir?" asked the porter. "Yes," said Leontiev. "I want a needle and some thread." "Something to repair, sir? I'll send the valet at once." "I don't want your valet," said Leontiev. "I want a needle and thread." He hung up; the idea of having a valet tinker with Zina's dressing-gown was insupportable. He examined the torn pocket and found that not only had the seam burst but that there was also a rent in the fabric. This gave his premonition of an impending catastrophe the seal of certainty. When he heard the messenger's knock at the door, he knew already the nature of the catastrophe; or at least it seemed to him afterward that he had known. At any rate, he could remember no feeling of surprise when he read the short message stating that his wife had died that morning "from internal hemorrhage following a motor car accident." The message had arrived on ticker-tape of the Commonwealth News Agency half an hour ago. The head of the Agency had sent it along accompanied by a covering note which read:

"Deep regrets. Under the circumstances we don't want to trouble

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you about the speech and shall edit the cabled version ourselves unless you have already finished it, in which case please hand over to the messenger."

The messenger, a pale youth with a thin, alert face, was eyeing Leontiev with curiosity. He was a boy from a working class suburb and a member of the Party, who had never before seen a Hero of Culture, nor such a luxurious hotel apartment; he felt that the combination of the two was vaguely disturbing. On the other hand, the old, worn dressing-gown and the fact that its pocket was even torn, impressed the boy favorably. He had a secret vice which he was unable to part with though he knew that it did not go with a revolutionary conscience: he collected autographs. Worse, the autographs in his collection were mainly those of boxers, bicycle champions and film stars, all of whom he knew to be parasites of a putrid society, whose sole function was to divert the attention of the masses from their economic plight and the revolutionary struggle. Now at last he was offered a chance to improve his collection by the signature of a confirmed Hero of Culture.

The great man was standing with his back to him, looking out of the window; he had apparently forgotten the boy's presence. There was something forbidding about the way he held his back and shoulders; but after all, the boy told himself, they were comrades in arms, members of the same movement. He cleared his throat:

"Monsieur," he called; his voice came out curiously thin in the silent room. Leontiev turned round. He stared at the boy. For a moment the boy thought that Leontiev was perhaps blind. He once more cleared his throat and steadied his voice. "Please will you sign this for me, monsieur?" he asked, holding out his cheap autograph album. Leontiev looked at him absent-mindedly, his fists in his pockets; suddenly he became conscious of the rent in the gown, quickly pulled his right hand out of the pocket and seemed to wake up.

"Yes," he said. "I will sign the receipt."

He took the album, looked sternly at the blank page, then a curious flash occurred in his eyes—it was, the boy thought, as if the current had been short-circuited behind his eyeballs.

"Wait," Leontiev said. "I wish to write a message to the head of the Agency." He took three quick steps to the desk and began to write in the album; he seemed to be electrified. The boy gaped,

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but did not dare to protest. He watched Leontiev write his message and it struck him that while the Hero's face was grim and his jaws pressed together so that the muscles stood out in knots on both sides, there was at the same time an odd smile at the corners of his mouth. Leontiev wrote:

"I cannot authorize any altered version of my speech. It has to be transmitted according to the original text. I shall make you responsible for any deviation from it."

He signed and gave the album to the boy. The whole man seemed to be changed. There was a flicker in his eyes. "Here," he said, handing money to the boy, "this is to buy yourself. . . . " He stopped, and looked at the boy with a kind of absent-minded curiosity. "What do boys of your age buy themselves in this country?"

The boy hesitated. At the sight of the unusually large tip, he had quickly weighed the alternatives of taking his girl to the pictures or to a dance hall. Now he desperately searched his mind for a more class-conscious investment. "It depends . . . " he said cautiously, his mind working. He was saved from further mental effort by a knock at the door and the entry of a valet in a striped waistcoat, just as valets were dressed in the movies. The boy took his chance and with a mumbled phrase of thanks, sidled out of the door.

"You asked for a needle and thread, sir," said the valet, offering these objects on a small silver tray with a look of unconcealed contempt. Leontiev had quite forgotten his request; now that he remembered it, it seemed to him that considerable time had elapsed since he had made it. "Why did it take so long?" he asked sternly. "Now it is no longer necessary." "Very good, sir," said the valet, turning on his heel. "Wait," said Leontiev, and took his dressing-gown off. "You may keep this. It is made of very good material." The valet held the dressing-gown between two fingers, his little finger stretched out to indicate his disgust. "Very good, sir. I shall give it to a charitable organization." "Yes," said Leontiev absently. "And bring me some brandy." "That's the room service, sir," said the valet, giving the waiter's bell button a vicious push as he went out. The valet was a member of the National Rally, who hated all foreigners, and particularly those from the Commonwealth.

As the door closed behind him, the telephone began to ring again. Leontiev lifted the receiver; it was Nikitin calling from the

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Embassy. He had just heard the news and wished to express the Ambassador's and his own sympathies. He went on to say that though everybody sympathized with Leontiev's bereavement, he had been instructed to ask Leontiev not to cancel his appearance at Monsieur Anatole's reception, as cultural propaganda was at the present moment more important than ever. "Of course I shall go," said Leontiev absently, and hung up.

There was another knock at the door and an old waiter with side-whiskers came in, asking what Leontiev wanted. Leontiev said he didn't want anything. The waiter respectfully insisted that Leontiev had rung the bell. Leontiev suddenly became angry and began to curse the waiter in his native language, telling him to go to the devil and leave him alone. The waiter looked at him uncomprehendingly, then, with a show of dignified distress, made for the door. "Wait," Leontiev called after him in French. "I wanted some brandy." "Very good, sir," said the waiter. He was a member of the Royalist Rally, and found his opinion confirmed that the Commonwealth was populated by savages.

The telephone rang again. It was a secretary of the personnel department of the Embassy who called to say that accommodation for Leontiev's return journey had been reserved for the next day; the plane would leave at 8 a.m. "It is no longer necessary," said Leontiev in the same voice in which he had refused the needle and thread. The secretary sounded startled; Leontiev hung up.

There was another knock at the door; the old waiter came in carrying a large glass of brandy on a tray. Leontiev downed it in one gulp, asked for another, and began to dress for Monsieur Anatole's reception.

He was ready now, and decided to walk instead of taking a taxi. He looked at his watch—a heavy gold watch, personal gift of the Marshal of Peace on Leontiev's fiftieth birthday. Only half an hour had passed since he had torn the pocket of his dressing-gown and events had started rolling in quick, smooth succession. Now that the brandy and a cold shower had cleared his mind, the events of that half hour appeared in retrospect like a film played with its sound track switched off. The missing sound track was his own numbed thoughts while he had talked to the messenger and written his note

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and answered the telephone and dealt with the valet and waiter. He had done all this without a single conscious thought, functioning like an automaton whose responses to any stimulus are built into the mechanism. Only at the moment of contact with the cold water under the shower had the sound track been suddenly switched on again. He knew then that his wife was dead and that he was alone to carry the burden of his freedom.

He glanced into the mirror and saw with wonder that nothing in his appearance had changed. He spread a street map on the table—the Cultural Attaché had provided him with one at his request, for Leontiev disliked asking people for information and being at the mercy of cab drivers. He saw that he only had a ten minutes' walk to Monsieur Anatole's He knew that for the next few hours he was still physically safe; that it would be more prudent not to return to the hotel, but that he must leave his things as if he intended to return. He did not care about their loss, except for the six new shirts which he had bought yesterday; they were of a quality unobtainable at home. This reminded him for the first time of his library, his country house, his swimming pool. He knew that without Zina the house would be a sepulchre; still, it was not easy to accept the loss of the fruits of thirty years of labor. Fifty-five was a difficult age for a man to start his life again, alone. Yet he felt braced by the prospect. It would be a bitter but a clean struggle.

He threw a last glance at the room, changed his mind, wrapped one of his new shirts, a razor and a toothbrush into a small parcel, using the paper in which the shirts had arrived. It was an inconspicuous parcel, it looked like a present. Avoiding the lift, he made his way downward over the soft carpeted stairs. The porter and the bell-boys bowed respectfully as he walked across the hall; he wondered which of them was employed to keep a check on him. He also thought that they were eyeing him with more than usual curiosity, but that was probably only his imagination.

As he walked down the Rue de Rivoli, the blue dusk of the summer evening had just begun to soften the contours of houses and trees. His feet were light as if the magic of the Paris pavement were counteracting the force of gravity. He had only been to Paris once before, twenty years ago, also at a Peace Rally—it had been in the days of the Popular Front. This time he had almost succeeded in

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obtaining permission for Zina to accompany him—but only almost. She had borne the disappointment bravely, although her main wish in life had been to go abroad once, only once; her chance had never come. But he had talked to her about Paris as one talks about a painting to the blind; and they had talked about the eternally promised trip together as convicts under a life sentence talk about the day of amnesty. He had shown her photographs of Notre Dame and of the quais; told her about the Montmartre cabarets, of the *bals musette* in the Rue de Lappe, of onion soup at daybreak in the Halles; and as he now crossed the Place de Carrousel with its fairyland view of two miles of gaslights blinking in the soft blue dusk, he kept up a silent running commentary to Zina, and heard her little cries of naive delight. Then, as he stood on the bridge, with the parcel dangling from his finger, and looked at the colored lights dancing on the river, he stopped his comments and became emphatically silent; and he heard her say with her soft Ukrainian lilt: But Lyovochka, it can't be that it has really come true. He felt a faint pain in his right index finger; the string of the spinning parcel must have tightened round it and cut the circulation some time ago; the tip of his finger looked blue and swollen.

He said soundlessly but distinctly: Zina, you must leave me alone because I still have some work to do. He saw her nod with resignation, and her image slowly faded away. Then he resumed his walk across the bridge.

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Irving Howe

THE BOOK OF THE GROTESQUE*

The history of *Winesburg* is a curious instance of the way criticism, with its passion for "placing," can reduce a writer to harmless irrelevance. At various times the book has been banished to such categories as the revolt against the village, the rejection of middle-class morality, the proclamation of sexual freedom, and the rise of cultural primitivism. Whatever the justification for such tags may once have been, it is now quite obvious that Anderson's revolt was directed against something far more fundamental than the restrictions of the American village and was, for that matter, equally relevant to the American city; that *Winesburg* is not primarily concerned with morality, middle-class or otherwise, if only because most of its characters are not in a position to engage in moral choice; that while its subject is frequently tangential to sex it expresses no opinions about and offers no proposals for sexual conduct, free or restricted; and that its style is only dimly related to anything that might be called primitive. If read as social fiction *Winesburg* is somewhat absurd, for no such town could possibly exist. If read as a venture into abnormal psychology the book seems almost lurid, for within its total structure the behavior of its hysterics and paranoids is quite purposeless and, in the absence of any norms to which their deviations might be compared, even incomprehensible. In fact, if read according to the usual expectations of twentieth-century naturalistic or conventionally realistic fiction, *Winesburg* seems incoherent and the charge of emotion it can still raise inexplicable.

In its fundamental quality *Winesburg* is non-realistic; it does not seek to gratify the eye with a verisimilitude to social forms in the way a Dreiser or Lewis novel does. In rather shy lyrical outbursts the book conveys a vision of American life as a depressed landscape

* This is a section from a critical biography of Sherwood Anderson, to be published this spring by William Sloane Associates, in the American Men of Letters Series.

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cluttered with dead stumps, twisted oddities, grotesque and pitiful wrecks; a landscape in which ghosts fumble erratically and romance is reduced to mere fugitive brushings at night; a landscape eerie with the cracked echoes of village queers rambling in their lonely eccentricity. Again and again *Winesburg* suggests that beneath the exteriors of our life the deformed exert dominion, that the seeming health of our state derives from a deep malignancy. And *Winesburg* echoes with American loneliness, that loneliness which could once evoke Nigger Jim's chant of praise to the Mississippi pastoral but which has here become fearful and sour.

Winesburg is a book largely set in twilight and darkness, its background heavily chiaroscuroed with gloomy blacks and marshy grays—as is proper for a world of withered men who, sheltered by night, reach out for that sentient life they dimly recall as the racial inheritance that has been squandered away. Like most fiction, *Winesburg* is a variation on the theme of reality and appearance, in which the deformations caused by day (public life) are intensified at night and, in their very extremity, become an entry to reality. From Anderson's instinctively right placement of the book's central actions at twilight and night comes some of its frequently noticed aura of "lostness"—as if the most sustaining and fertile human activities can no longer be performed in public communion but must be grasped in secret.

The two dozen central figures in *Winesburg* are hardly characters in the usual novelistic sense. They are not shown in depth or breadth, complexity or ambiguity; they are allowed no variations of action or opinion; they do not, with the exception of George Willard, the book's "hero," grow or decline. For Anderson is not trying to represent through sensuous images the immediate surface of human experience; he is rather drawing the abstract and deliberately distorted paradigm of an extreme situation, and for that purpose fully-rounded characterizations could only be a complicating blemish.

The figures of *Winesburg* usually personify to fantastic excess a condition of psychic deformity which is the consequence of some aborted effort to extend their personalities or proffer their love. These deformities—misogyny, inarticulateness, frigidity, God-infatuation, homosexuality, drunkenness—are symptoms of their recoil from the

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regularities of human intercourse and sometimes of their substitute gratifications in inanimate objects, as with the unloved Alice Hindman who "because it was her own, could not bear to have anyone touch the furniture of her room." In their compulsive traits these figures find a kind of dulling peace, but as a consequence they are deprived of one of the great blessings of human health: the capacity for a variety of experience. That is why, in a sense, "nothing happens" in *Winesburg*. For most of its figures it is too late for anything to happen, they can only muse over the traumas which have so harshly limited their spontaneity. Stripped of their animate wholeness and twisted into frozen postures of defense, they are indeed what Anderson has called them: grotesques.

The world of *Winesburg,* populated largely by these back-street grotesques, soon begins to seem like a buried ruin of a once vigorous society, an atrophied remnant of the egalitarian moment of nineteenth-century America. Though many of the book's sketches are placed in the out-of-doors, its atmosphere is as stifling as a tomb. And the reiteration of the term "grotesque" is felicitous in a way Anderson could hardly have been aware of; for it was first used by Renaissance painters to describe arabesques and drawings found in the underground ruins, *grotte,* of Nero's "Golden House."

The conception of the grotesque, as actually developed in the stories, is not merely that it is an unwilled affliction but also that it is a mark of a once sentient striving. In his introductory fantasy, "The Book of the Grotesque," Anderson writes, "It was the truths that made the people grotesques . . . the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced a falsehood." There is a sense, as will be seen later, in which these sentences are at variance with the book's meaning, but they do suggest the significant notion that the grotesques are those who *had* sought "the truths" that disfigured them. By contrast the banal creatures who dominate the town's official life, such as Will Henderson, publisher of the paper for which George Willard works, are not even grotesques: they are simply clods. The grotesques are those whose humanity has been outraged and who to survive in Winesburg have had to suppress their wish to love. Wash Williams becomes a misogynist because his mother-in-law, hoping to reconcile him to his

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faithless wife, thrusts her into his presence naked; Wings Biddlebaum becomes a recluse because his wish to blend learning with affection is fatally misunderstood. Grotesqueness, then, is not merely the shield of deformity; it is also a remnant of misshapen feeling, what Dr. Reefy in "Paper Pills" calls "the sweetness of the twisted apples."

Winesburg may thus be read as a fable of American estrangement, its theme the loss of love. The book's major characters are alienated from the basic sources of emotional sustenance—from the nature in which they live but to which they can no longer have an active relationship; from the fertility of the farms that flank them but no longer fulfill their need for creativity; from the community which, at least by the claim of the American mythos, once bound men together in fraternity but is now merely an institution external to their lives; from the work which once evoked and fulfilled their sense of craft but is now a mere burden; and most catastrophic of all, from each other, the very extremity of their need for love having itself become a barrier to its realization.

The grotesques rot because they are unused, their energies deprived of outlet and their instincts curdled in isolation. As Waldo Frank has noticed in his fine study of *Winesburg,* the first three stories in the book suggest this view in a complete theme-statement. The story, "Hands," through several symbolic referents, depicts the loss of creativity in the use of the human body. The second story, "Paper Pills," directly pictures the progressive ineffectuality of human thought, pocketed in paper pellets that no one reads. And the third story, "Mother," relates these two themes to a larger variant: the inability of Elizabeth Willard, *Winesburg's* mother-figure, to communicate her love to her son. "The form of the mother, frustrate, lonely, at last desperate," Frank writes, "pervades the variations that make the rest of the book: a continuity of variation swelling, swirling into the corners and crannies of the village life; and at last closing in the mother's death, in the loss forever of the $800 which Elizabeth Willard had kept for twenty years to give her son his start away from Winesburg, and in the son's wistful departure." In the rupture of family love and the consequent loss of George Willard's heritage, the theme-statement of the book is completed.

The book's central strand of action, discernible in about half the stories, is the effort of the grotesques to establish intimate rela-

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tions with George Willard, the young reporter. At night, when they need not fear the mockery of public detection, they hesitantly approach him, almost in supplication, to tell him of their afflictions and perhaps find health in his voice. Instinctively, they sense his moral freshness, finding hope in the fact that he has not yet been calloused by knowledge and time. To some of the grotesques, such as Dr. Reefy and Dr. Parcival, George Willard is the lost son returned, the Daedalus whose apparent innocence and capacity for feeling will redeem Winesburg. To others among the grotesques, such as Tom Foster and Elmer Cowley, he is a reporter-messenger, a small-town Hermes, bringing news of a dispensation which will allow them to re-enter the world of men. But perhaps most fundamentally, and subsuming these two visions of George Willard, he seems to the grotesques a young priest who will renew the forgotten communal rites by which they may again be bound together. To Louise Trunnion he will bring a love that is more than a filching of flesh; to Dr. Parcival the promise to "write the book that I may never get written" in which he will tell all men that "everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified"; to the Reverend Curtis Hartman the willingness to understand a vision of God as revealed in the flesh of a naked woman; to Wash Williams the peace that will ease his sense of violation; and to Enoch Robinson the "youthful sadness, young man's sadness, the sadness of a growing boy in a village at the year's end [which can open] the lips of the old man."

As they approach George Willard, the grotesques seek not merely the individual release of a sudden expressive outburst, but also a relation with each other that may restore them to collective harmony. They are distraught communicants in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living; a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion. Their estrangement is so extreme that they cannot turn to each other, though it is each other they really need and secretly want; they turn instead to George Willard, who will soon be out of the orbit of their life. The miracle that the Reverend Curtis Hartman sees and the message over which Kate Swift broods could bind one to the other, yet they both turn to George Willard who, receptive as he may wish to be, cannot understand them.

In only one story, "Death," do the grotesques seem to meet.

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Elizabeth Willard and Dr. Reefy embrace in a moment of confession, but their approach to love is interrupted by a stray noise. Elizabeth leaves: "The thing that had come to life in her as she talked to her one friend died suddenly." A few months later, at her deathbed, Dr. Reefy meets George Willard and puts out "his hand as though to greet the young man and then awkwardly [draws] it back again." Bloom does not find his Daedalus; the hoped-for epiphany comes at the verge of death and, as in all the stories, is aborted; the ritual of communal love remains unrealized.

The burden which the grotesques would impose on George Willard is beyond his strength. He is not yet himself a grotesque mainly because he has not yet experienced very deeply, but for the role to which they would assign him he is too absorbed with his own ambition and restlessness. The grotesques see in his difference from them the possibility of saving themselves but actually it is the barrier to an ultimate companionship. All that George Willard's adolescent receptivity to the grotesques can give him is the momentary emotional illumination described in that lovely story, "Sophistication." On the eve of his departure from Winesburg, George Willard reaches the point "when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. . . . With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. . . . Already he hears death calling. With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with all his hands. . . . " For George this illumination is enough, but it is not for the grotesques. They are a moment in his education, he a confirmation of their doom. "I have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me," he says to himself one night as he falls asleep. He has missed the meaning of Kate Swift's life: it is not his fault: her salvation, as the salvation of the other grotesques, is beyond his capacities.

In the story "Queer" these meanings receive their most generalized expression, for its grotesque, Elmer Cowley, has no specific deformity: he is the grotesque as such. "He was, he felt, one condemned to go through life without friends and he hated the thought." Wishing to talk to George Willard, he loses courage and instead rants

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to a half-wit: "I had to tell some one and you were the only one I could tell. I hunted out another queer one, you see. I ran away, that's what I did." When Elmer Cowley does call George Willard out of the newspaper office, he again becomes tongue-tied in his presence. Despairing over "his failure to declare his determination not to be queer," Elmer Cowley decides to leave Winesburg, but in a last effort at communication he asks George Willard to meet him at the midnight local. Again he cannot speak. "Elmer Cowley danced with fury beside the groaning train in the darkness on the station platform. . . . Like one struggling for release from hands that held him he struck, hitting George Willard blow after blow on the breast, the neck, the mouth." Unable to give Elmer Cowley the love that might dissolve his queerness, George Willard suffers the fate of the rejected priest.

From the story, "Queer," it is possible to abstract the choreography of *Winesburg*. Its typical action is a series of dance maneuvers by figures whose sole distinctive characteristic is an extreme deformity of movement or posture. Each of these grotesques dances, with angular indirection and muted pathos, toward a central figure who seems to them young, fresh and radiant. For a moment they seem to draw close to him and thereby to abandon their stoops and limps, but this moment quickly dissolves in the play of the dance and perhaps it never even existed: the central figure cannot be reached. Slowly and painfully, the grotesques withdraw while the young man leaves the stage entirely. None of the grotesques is seen full-face for more than a moment, and none of them is individually important to the scheme of the dance. For this is a dance primarily of spatial relationships rather than solo virtuosity; the distances established between the dancers, rather than their personalities, form the essence of the dance. And in the end, its meaning is revealed in the fact that all but the one untouched youth return to precisely their original places and postures.

When Anderson first sent his *Winesburg* stories to the *Masses, Seven Arts* and the *Little Review,* he intended each of them to be self-contained units, as in fact they may still be regarded. But there was clearly a unifying conception behind all the stories: they were set in the same locale, many of the characters appeared in several

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stories, and there was a remarkable consistency of mood that carried over from story to story. Consequently when Anderson prepared them for book publication in 1919, he had only to make a few minor changes, mostly insertions of place and character names as connectives, in order to have a unified book.

Particularly if approached along the lines that have been suggested here, *Winesburg* seems remarkably of a piece. The only stories which do not fit into its pattern are the four-part narrative of Jesse Bentley, a failure in any case, and possibly "The Untold Lie," a beautiful story measuring the distance between middle-age and youth. Of the others only "Tandy" is so bad that its omission would help the book. On the other hand, few of the stories read as well in isolation as in the book's context. Except for "Hands," "The Strength of God," "Paper Pills," and "The Untold Lie," they individually lack the dramatic power which the book has as a whole.

Winesburg is an excellently formed piece of fiction, each of its stories following a parabola of movement which graphs the book's meaning. From a state of feeling rather than a dramatic conflict there develops in one of the grotesques a rising lyrical excitement, usually stimulated to intensity by the presence of George Willard. At the moment before reaching a climax, this excitement is frustrated by a fatal inability at communication and then it rapidly dissolves into its original diffuse base. This structural pattern is sometimes varied by an ironic turn, as in "Nobody Knows" and "A Man of Ideas," but in only one story, "Sophistication," is the emotional ascent allowed to move forward without interruption.

But the unity of the book depends on more than the congruous design of its parts. The first three stories of *Winesburg* develop its major theme, which, after several variations, reaches its most abstract version in "Queer." The stories following "Queer" seem somewhat of a thematic afterthought, though they are necessary for a full disposal of the characters. The one conspicuous disharmony in the book is that the introductory "Book of the Grotesque" suggests that the grotesques are victims of their willful fanaticism, while in the stories themselves grotesqueness is the result of an essentially valid resistance to forces external to its victims.

Through a few simple but extremely effective symbols, the stories are both related to the book's larger meaning and defined in their

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uniqueness. For the former of these purposes, the most important symbol is that of the room, frequently used to suggest isolation and confinement. Kate Swift is alone in her bedroom, Dr. Reefy in his office, the Reverend Curtis Hartman in his church tower, Enoch Robinson in his fantasy-crowded room. Enoch Robinson's story "is in fact the story of a room almost more than it is the story of a man." The tactful use of this symbol lends *Winesburg* a claustrophobic aura appropriate to its theme.

Most of the stories are further defined by symbols related to their particular meanings. The story of the misogynist Wash Williams begins by rapidly thrusting before the reader an image of "a huge, grotesque kind of monkey, a creature with ugly sagging, hairless skin," which dominates its subsequent action. And more valid than any abstract statement of theme is the symbolic power of that moment in "The Strength of God" when the Reverend Curtis Hartman, in order to peek into Kate Swift's bedroom, breaks his church window at precisely the place where the figure of a boy stands "motionless and looking with rapt eyes into the face of Christ."

Though *Winesburg* is written in the bland accents of the American story-teller, it has an economy impossible to oral narration because Anderson varies the beat of its accents by occasionally whipping them into quite formal rhetorical patterns. In the book's best stretches there is a tension between its underlying loose oral cadences and the stiffened super-imposed beat of a prose almost Biblical in its regularity. Anderson's prose is neither "natural" nor primitive; it is rather a hushed bardic chant, low-toned and elegiacally awkward, deeply related to native speech rhythms yet very much the result of literary cultivation.

But the final effectiveness of this prose is in its prevalent tone of tender inclusiveness. Between writer and materials there is an admirable equity of relationship. None of the characters is violated, none of the stories, even the failures, leaves the reader with the bitter sense of having been tricked by cleverness or cheapness or toughness. The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth and a readiness to accept Winesburg's lost grotesques with the embrace of humility. Many American writers have taken as their theme the loss of love in the modern world but few, if any at all, have so thoroughly realized it in the accents of love.

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Elizabeth Bishop

POEMS

I RAIN TOWARDS MORNING

The great light cage has broken up in the air,
freeing, I think, about a million birds
whose wild ascending shadows will not be back,
and all the wires come falling down.
No cage, no frightening birds, the rain
is brightening now. The face is pale
that tried the puzzle of their prison,
that changed it with an unexpected kiss,
whose freckled unsuspected hands alit.

II

The tumult in the heart
keeps asking questions.
And then it stops and undertakes to answer
in the same tone of voice.
No one could tell the difference.

Uninnocent, these conversations start,
and then engage the senses,
only half meaning to.
And then there is no choice,
and then there is no sense;

until a name
and all its connotation are the same.

III

Wasted, wasted, minutes that couldn't be worse,
minutes of a barbaric condescension.
—Stare out the bathroom window at the fir-trees,
at their dark needles, accretions to no purpose

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woodenly crystallized, and where two fireflies
are only lost.
Hear nothing but a train that goes, must go, by like tension,
nothing. And wait:
maybe even now these minutes' host
emerges, some relaxed uncondescending stranger,
a soul's release.
And while the fireflies
are failing to illuminate these nightmare trees
might they not mean his green gay eyes.

W. M. Meredith, Jr.

A VIEW OF THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

The growing need to be moving around it to see it,
To prevent its freezing, as with sculpture and metaphor,
Finds now skeins, now strokes of the sun in a dark
Crucifixion etching, until you end by caring
What the man's name was who made it,
The way old people care about names, and are
Forever seeing resemblances to people now dead

Of stone and the two metals drawn out so
That at every time of day
They speak out of strong resemblances, as:
Wings whirring so that you see only where
Their strokes finish, or: spokes of dissynchronous wheels

Whose pictures and poems should accurately be signed
With the engineer's name, whatever he meant;
These are called *Tines inflicting a river, justly,*
And, thinking how the cables owe each something
To the horizontal and something to the vertical,
A graph of the odds against
Any one man's producing a masterpiece

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Yet far from his, the engineer's, at sunset
And again at sunrise, when,
Like the likenesses the old see,
Loveliness besets it as haphazard as genes:
Fortunate accidents take the form of cities
At either end, the cities give their poor edges
To the river, the buildings there
The fair color that things have to be.
Oh, the paper reeds by a brook
Or the lakes that lie on bayous like a leopard
Are not at more seeming random, or more certain
In their sheen how to stand than are these towns

And of the rivering vessels so and so
Where the shadow of the bridges rakes them once,
The best you can think is that, come there, a pilot
Will know what he's done when his ship is fingered

Like that Greek boy whose name I now forget
Whose youth was a long study to cut stone;
One day his mallet slipped, a goddess willing,
Who only meant to take his afternoon,
So that the marble opened on a girl
Seated at music and wonderfully sinewed
Under linen, riffling a harp;
At which he knew not that delight alone
The impatient muse intended, but coupled with it, grief—
The strings in particular were so light—
And put his chisel down for marveling on that stone.

THE FISHVENDOR

Where he stood in boots in water to his calves,
A kind of fisherman, dispensing with a dipnet
Sullen carp into tubs of ice,
Was only in a tank on the back of a truck.

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Blocks off gulls fell to investigate
What they took to be sardine cans
On the river shiningly, but who contended
For his thick brown fish were rather wives
With boiling dishes in their eyes,
Women estranged from live water and flavorless;

Where cats did not wait for the heads,
The scene was that strong,
I saw the mistaken sea-birds from a corner,
Hearing the fisherman shift his feet in the brine,
The fish gasping without resignation, the shoppers,
Half-tame now at noon,
Naming the coins that routed all of the cats
And rendered that whole quarter poorer.

THE WATERWAYS

On favorable terms I have sometime been
Diminished imperceptibly, like an island city
Where the streets, far-sighted in their time,
Take half the land at last and give no thoroughfare.
Now a commission views it from the air
Too late by years to lay out parks and traffic
On anything like the scale the site suggests.
But wherever I strike the waterfront, afternoons,
Moves evenly one of two gull-soared rivers:
It boils with salt tide or its headwaters,
It is at the full with earliest water, changing the banks;
And here the city, all port, gives on the ocean generously
Like a man who, if with regard to love only,
Is determined he will not take terms.

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Vladimir Nabokov

EXILE*

I

The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free. I thought this up when I was a schoolboy, and I also discovered that Hegel's triadic series expressed merely the essential spirality of all things in their relation to time. Twirl follows twirl, and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series. If we consider the simplest spiral, three stages may be distinguished in it, corresponding to those of the triad: we can call "thetic" the small curve or arc that initiates the convolution centrally; "antithetic" the larger arc that faces the first in the process of continuing it; and "synthetic" the still ampler arc that continues the second while following the first along the outer side.

A colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life. The twenty years I spent in my native Russia (1899-1919) take care of the thetic arc. Twenty-one years of voluntary exile in England, Germany and France (1919-1940) supply the obvious antithesis. The decade I have already spent in my adopted country (1940-1950), looks like the beginning of a synthetic envelopment. For the moment I am concerned with my antithetic years and more particularly with my life in continental Europe after I had graduated from Cambridge in 1922.

As I look back at those years of exile, I see myself and thousands of other Russians leading an odd but by no means unpleasant existence, in material indigence and intellectual luxury, among perfectly unimportant strangers, spectral Germans and Frenchmen in whose more or less illusory cities we *émigrés* happened to dwell. These

* This is a chapter from an autobiography, *Conclusive Evidence,* to be published this winter by Harpers.

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aborigines were to the mind's eye as flat and transparent as figures cut out of cellophane, and although we used their gadgets, applauded their clowns, picked their roadside plums and apples, no real communication, of the rich human sort so widespread in our own midst, existed between us and them. It seemed at times that we ignored them the way an arrogant or very stupid invader ignores a formless and faceless mass of natives; but occasionally, quite often in fact, the spectral world through which we serenely paraded our sores and our arts, would produce a kind of awful convulsion and show us who was the discarnate captive and who the true lord. Our utter physical dependence on this or that nation, which had coldly granted us political refuge, became painfully evident when some trashy "visa," some diabolical "identity card" had to be obtained or prolonged, for then an avid bureaucratic hell would attempt to close upon the petitioner and he might wilt while his dossier waxed fatter and fatter in the desks of rat-whiskered consuls and policemen. *Dokumenty,* it has been said, is a Russian's placenta. The League of Nations equipped *émigrés* who had lost their Russian citizenship with a so-called "Nansen" passport, a very inferior document of a sickly green hue. Its holder was little better than a criminal on parole and had to go through most hideous ordeals every time he wished to travel from one country to another, and the smaller the countries the worse the fuss they made. Somewhere at the back of their glands, the authorities secreted the notion that no matter how bad a state—say, Soviet Russia—might be, any fugitive from it was intrinsically despicable since he existed outside a national administration; and therefore he was viewed with the preposterous disapproval with which certain religious groups regard a child born out of wedlock. Not all of us consented to be bastards and ghosts. Sweet are the recollections some Russian *émigrés* treasure of how they insulted or fooled high officials at various ministries, *Préfectures* and *Polizeipraesidiums.*

In Berlin and Paris, the two capitals of exile, Russians formed compact colonies, with a coefficient of culture that greatly surpassed the cultural mean of the necessarily more diluted foreign communities among which they were placed. Within these colonies they kept to themselves. I have in mind, of course, Russian intellectuals, mostly belonging to democratic groups and not the flashier kind of person who "was, you know, adviser to the Czar or something" that Amer-

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ican club women immediately think of whenever "White Russians" are mentioned. Life in those settlements was so full and intense that these Russian *"intelligenty"* (a word that has more socially idealistic and less highbrow connotations than "intellectuals" as used here) had neither time nor reason to seek ties beyond their own circle. Today, in a new and beloved world, where I have learned to feel at home as easily as I have ceased barring my sevens, extroverts and cosmopolitans to whom I happen to mention these past matters think I am jesting, or accuse me of snobbery in reverse, when I maintain that in the course of almost one-fifth of a century spent in western Europe I have not had, among the sprinkling of Germans and Frenchmen I knew (mostly landladies and literary people), more than two good friends all told.

Somehow, during my secluded years in Germany, I never came across those gentle musicians of yore who, in Turgenev's novels, played their rhapsodies far into the summer night; or that type of pottering, old-fashioned butterfly-collector who was wont to pin his captures in the straw of his hat; or simply the so-called wholesome and kindly folks that during the last war homesick soldiers from the Middle West seem to have so much preferred to the cagey French farmer and to brisk Madelon II. On the contrary, the most vivid figure I find when sorting out in memory the meager stack of my non-Russian and non-Jewish acquaintances in the years between the two wars is the image of a young German university student, well-bred, quiet, bespectacled, whose hobby was capital punishment. At our second meeting he showed me a collection of photographs among which was a purchased series (*"Ein bischen retouchiert,"* he said, wrinkling his freckled nose) that depicted the successive stages of a routine execution in China; he commented, very expertly, on the splendor of the lethal sword and on the spirit of perfect co-operation between headsman and victim, which culminated in a veritable geyser of mist-gray blood spouting from the very clearly photographed neck of the decapitated party. Being pretty well off, this young collector could afford to travel, and travel he did, in between the humanities he studied for his Ph.D. He complained, however, of continuous ill luck and added that if he did not see something really good soon, he might not stand the strain. He had attended a few passable hangings in the Balkans and a well-advertised, although rather bleak and me-

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chanical *guillotinade* (he liked to use what he thought was colloquial French) on the Boulevard Arago in Paris; but somehow he never was sufficiently close to observe everything in detail. Despite a bad cold, he had journeyed to Regensburg where beheading was violently performed with an axe; he had expected great things from that spectacle but, to his intense disappointment, the subject had apparently been drugged and had hardly reacted at all, beyond feebly flopping about on the ground while the masked executioner and his clumsy mate fell all over him. Dietrich (my acquaintance's first name) hoped one day to go to the States so as to witness a couple of electrocutions; from this word, in his innocence, he derived the adjective "cute," which he had learned from a cousin of his who had been to America, and with a little frown of wistful worry Dietrich wondered if it were really true that, during the act, sensational puffs of smoke issued from the natural orifices of the body. At our third and last encounter (there still remained bits of him I wanted to file for possible use) he related to me, more in sorrow than in anger, that he had once spent a whole night patiently watching a good friend of his who had decided to commit suicide and had agreed to do so in his presence, but—having no sense of honor—had got hopelessly tight instead. Although I have lost track of Dietrich long ago, I can well imagine the look of calm satisfaction in his fish-blue eyes as he shows, nowadays (perhaps at the very minute I am writing this) a never expected profusion of treasures to his thigh-clapping, guffawing co-veterans—the absolutely *wunderbare* pictures he took during Hitler's reign.

II

With a very few exceptions, all liberal-minded creative forces—poets, novelists, critics, historians, philosophers, and so on—had left Lenin's Russia. Those that had not were either withering away there or adulterating their gifts by complying with the political demands of the state. What the Czars had never been able to achieve, namely the complete curbing of minds to the government's will, was achieved by the Bolsheviks in no time after the main contingent of intellectuals had escaped abroad or had been destroyed. The lucky group of expatriates could now follow their pursuits with such

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utter impunity that, in fact, they sometimes asked themselves if the sense of enjoying absolute mental freedom was not due to their working in an absolute void. True, there was among *émigrés* a sufficient number of good readers to warrant the publication, in Berlin, Paris, and other towns, of Russian books and periodicals on a comparatively large scale; but since none of these writings could circulate within the Soviet Union, the whole thing acquired a certain air of fragile unreality. The number of titles was more impressive than the number of copies any given work sold, and the names of the publishing houses—"Orion," "Cosmos," "Logos," and so forth—had the feverish, unstable and slightly illegal appearance that firms issuing astrological or facts-of-life literature have. In serene retrospect, however, and judged by artistic and scholarly standards alone, the books produced *in vacuo* by *émigré* writers seem today, whatever their individual faults, more permanent and more suitable for human consumption than the slavish, singularly provincial and conventional streams of political consciousness that came during the same years from the pens of young Soviet authors whom a fatherly state provided with ink, pipes, and pullovers.

Quite a feature of *émigré* life, in keeping with its itinerant and dramatic character, was the abnormal frequency of literary readings in private houses or hired halls. The various types of performers stand out very distinctly in the puppet show going on in my mind. There was the faded actress with eyes like precious stones who, having pressed for a moment a clenched handkerchief to a feverish mouth, proceeded to evoke nostalgic echoes of the Moscow Art Theater by subjecting some famous piece of verse to the action, half dissection and half caress, of her slow limpid voice. There was the hopelessly second-rate author whose voice trudged through a fog of rhythmic prose, and one could watch the nervous trembling of his poor, clumsy, but careful fingers every time he tucked the page he had finished under those to come, so that his manuscript retained throughout the reading its appalling and pitiful thickness. There was the young poet in whom his envious brethren could not help seeing a disturbing streak of genius as striking as the stripe of a skunk: erect on the stage, pale and glazed-eyed, with nothing in his hands to anchor him to this world, he would throw back his head and deliver his poem in a highly irritating, rolling chant and stop abruptly at the

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end, slamming the door of the last line and waiting for applause to fill the hush. And there was the old *cher maître* dropping, pearl by pearl, an admirable tale he had read innumerable times, and always in the same manner, wearing the expression of fastidious distaste that his nobly furrowed face had in the frontispiece of his collected works.

I suppose it would be easy for a detached observer to poke fun at all these hardly palpable people who imitated in foreign cities a dead civilization, the remote, almost legendary, almost Sumerian mirages of St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1916 (which, even then, in the twenties and thirties, sounded like 1900-1916 B.C.). But at least they were rebels as most major Russian writers had been ever since Russian literature had existed, and true to this insurgent condition which their sense of justice and liberty craved for as strongly as it had done under the oppression of the Czars, *émigrés* regarded as monstrously un-Russian and subhuman the behavior of pampered authors in the Soviet Union, the servile response on the part of those authors to every shade of every governmental decree; for the art of prostration was growing there in exact ratio to the increasing efficiency of first Lenin's, then Stalin's political police, and the successful Soviet writer was the one whose fine ear caught the soft whisper of an official suggestion long before it had become a blare.

Owing to the limited circulation of their works abroad, even the older generation of *émigré* writers whose fame had been solidly established in pre-Revolution Russia, could not hope that their books would make a living for them. Writing a weekly column for an *émigré* paper was never quite sufficient to keep body and pen together. Now and then translations into other languages brought in an unexpected scoop; but, otherwise, grants from various *émigré* organizations, earnings from public readings and lavish private charity were responsible for prolonging elderly authors' lives. Younger, less known but more adaptable writers supplemented chance subsidies by engaging in various jobs. I remember teaching English and tennis. Patiently I thwarted the persistent knack Berlin businessmen had of pronouncing "business" so as to rhyme with "dizziness"; and like a slick automaton, under the slow-moving clouds of a long summer day, on dusty courts, I ladled ball after ball over the net to their tanned, bob-haired daughters. For five dollars (quite a sum during the inflation in Germany) I translated *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian. I helped compile a Russian grammar for foreigners in which the first

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exercise began with the words *"Madam, ya doktor, vot banan"* (Madam, I am the doctor, here is a banana). Best of all, I used to compose for a daily *émigré* paper, the Berlin *Rul,* the first Russian crossword puzzles, which I baptized *"krestoslovitsy."* I find it strange to recall that freak existence. Deeply beloved of blurbists is the list of more or less earthy professions that a young author (writing about Life and Truth—which are so much more important, of course, than mere "art") has followed: newspaper boy, soda jerk, monk, wrestler, foreman in a steel mill, bus driver, and so on. Alas, none of these callings has been mine.

My passion for good writing put me in close contact with various Russian authors abroad. I was young in those days and much more keenly interested in literature than I am now. Current prose and poetry, brilliant planets and pale galaxies, flowed by the casement of my garret night after night. There were independent authors of diverse age and talent, and there were groupings and cliques within which a number of young or youngish writers, some of them very gifted, clustered around a philosophizing critic. The most important of these mystagogues were the so-called Adamites, an appellation fancifully derived (by the poet Hodasevich, I think) from the name of their leader, a talented critic who strove to combine the greenish twilight of a kind of catacumbal Christianity with the pagan mores of ancient Rome.

The Adamites believed that neither a mere negation of Bolshevism, nor the routine ideals of Western democracies were sufficient to build a philosophy upon which *émigré* literature could lean. They thirsted for a creed as a jailed drug addict thirsts for his pet heaven. Rather pathetically, they envied Parisian Catholic groups for the seasoned subtleties that Russian mysticism so obviously lacked. Dostoevskian emotion could not compete with neo-Thomist thought; but were there not other ways? The longing for a system of faith, a constant teetering on the brink of some accepted religious formula, was found to provide a special satisfaction of its own. Only much later, in the forties, did most of the Adamites finally discover a definite slope down which to slide. This slope was the enthusiastic nationalism that could call a state (Stalin's Russia, in this case) good and lovable for no other reason than because its army had won a war. In the early thirties, however, the nationalistic precipice was only faintly perceived and the Adamites were still enjoying the

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thrills of slippery suspension. In their attitude toward literature they were curiously conservative; with them soul-saving came first, log-rolling next, and art last. A retrospective glance nowadays notes the surprising fact of these free belles-lettrists abroad aping fettered thought at home by decreeing that to be a representative of a group or an epoch was more important than to be an individual writer.

Vladislav Hodasevich used to complain, in the twenties and thirties, that young *émigré* poets had borrowed their art form from him while following the Merezhkovski and Adamovich cliques in modish *angoisse* and soul-reshaping. I developed a great liking for this bitter, lean, sickly man, wrought of irony and metal-like genius, whose poetry was as complex a marvel as that of Tiutchev or Blok. He was, physically, of a somewhat simian aspect, with triangular nostrils and heavy brows, and when I conjure him up in my mind he never rises from the hard chair on which he sits, his thin legs crossed, his eyes glittering with malevolence and wit, his long fingers screwing into a holder the half of a *Caporal Vert* cigarette. There are few things in modern world poetry comparable to the poems of his "Heavy Lyre," but unfortunately for his fame the perfect frankness he indulged in when voicing his dislikes made him some terrible enemies among the most powerful critical coteries. Not all the Adamites were Dostoevskian Alioshas; there were also a few thugs in the group, and Hodasevich's poetry was played down with the thoroughness of a vindictive racket.

Another independent writer was Bunin. I had always preferred his little-known verse to his celebrated prose (their interrelation, within the frame of his work, recalls Hardy's case). At the time I found him tremendously perturbed by the personal problem of aging: the first thing he said to me was to remark, with satisfaction, that his posture was better than mine, despite his being some thirty years older than I. He was basking in the Nobel prize he had just received and invited me to some kind of expensive and fashionable eating place in Paris for a heart-to-heart talk. Unfortunately I happen to have a morbid dislike for restaurants and cafés, especially Parisian ones—I detest crowds, harried waiters, bohemians, vermouth concoctions, coffee, *zakuski*, floor shows, and so forth. I like to eat and drink in a recumbent position (preferably on a couch) and in silence. Heart-to-heart talks, confessions in the Dostoevskian manner are also not in my line. Bunin, a spry old gentleman with a rich and

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unchaste vocabulary, was puzzled by my unresponsiveness to good food and exasperated by my refusal to discuss eschatological matters. Toward the end of the meal we were utterly bored with each other. "You will die in dreadful pain and complete isolation," remarked Bunin bitterly as we went toward the cloakroom. An attractive, frail-looking girl took the check for our heavy overcoats and presently fell with them in her embrace upon the low counter. I wanted to help Bunin into his raglan but he stopped me with a proud gesture of his open hand. Still struggling perfunctorily—*he* was now trying to help *me*—we emerged into the pallid bleakness of a Paris winter day. My companion was about to button his collar when a look of surprise and distress twisted his aquiline features. Gingerly opening his overcoat, he began tugging at something under his armpit. I came to his assistance and together we finally dragged out of his sleeve my long woolen scarf which the girl had tucked into the wrong coat. The thing came out inch by inch; it was like unwrapping a mummy and we kept slowly revolving around each other in the process. Then, when the operation was over, we walked on without a word to a street corner where we shook hands and separated. Subsequently we used to meet quite often, but always in the midst of other people, generally in the house of Fondaminsky-Bunakov (a saintly and heroic soul who did more for Russian *émigré* literature than any other man and who died in a German prison). Somehow Bunin and I adopted a bantering and rather depressing give-and-take sort of double talk, which I regret now when there is so little chance of my ever revisiting him in remote France.

I met many other *émigré* Russian authors. I did not meet Poplavsky who died young, a far violin among near balalaikas. His plangent tonalities I shall never forget, nor shall I ever forgive myself the ill-tempered review in which I attacked him for trivial flaws in his unfledged verse. I met wise, prim, charming Aldanov; decrepit Kuprin, carefully carrying a bottle of *vin ordinaire* through rainy streets; Eichenwald—a Russian version of Walter Pater—later killed by a trolley car; Marina Tsvetaeva, wife of a double agent and a poet of genius, who, in the late thirties, returned to Russia and perished there. But the author that interested me most was naturally Sirin. He belonged to my generation. Among the young writers produced in exile he turned out to be the only major one. Beginning

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with the appearance of his first novel in 1925 and throughout the next fifteen years, until he vanished as strangely as he had come, his work kept provoking an acute and rather morbid interest on the part of critics. Just as Marxist publicists of the eighties in old Russia would have denounced his lack of concern with the economic structure of society, so the mystagogues of *émigré* letters deplored his lack of religious insight and of moral preoccupation. Everything about him was bound to offend Russian conventions and especially that Russian sense of decorum which, for example, an American shocks so dangerously today, when in the presence of Soviet military men of distinction he happens to lounge with both hands in his trouser pockets. Conversely, Sirin's admirers made much, perhaps too much, of his unusual style, brilliant precision, functional imagery and that sort of thing. Russian readers who had been raised on the sturdy straightforwardness of Russian realism and had called the bluff of decadent cheats, were impressed by the mirror-like angles of his clear, but weirdly misleading, sentences and by the fact that the real life of his books flowed in his figures of speech, which one critic has compared to "windows giving upon a contiguous world . . . a rolling corollary, the shadow of a train of thought." Across the dark sky of exile Sirin passed, to use a simile of a more conservative nature, like a meteor, and disappeared, leaving nothing much behind him other than a vague sense of uneasiness. His best works are those in which he condemns his people to the solitary confinement of their souls. His first two novels are to my taste mediocre; among the other six or seven the most haunting are "Invitation to a Beheading," which deals with the incarceration of a rebel in a picture-postcard fortress by the buffoons and bullies of a Communazist state; and "Luzhin's Defense," which is about a champion chess player who goes mad when chess combinations pervade the actual pattern of his existence.

III

Speaking of chess reminds me that in the course of my twenty years of exile I devoted a prodigious amount of time to the composing of chess problems. A certain position is elaborated on the board, and the problem to be solved is how to mate Black in a given

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number of moves, generally two or three. It is a beautiful, complex, and sterile art related to the ordinary form of the game only insofar as, say, the properties of a sphere are made use of both by a juggler in weaving a new act and by a tennis player in winning a tournament. Most chess players, in fact, amateurs and masters alike, are only mildly interested in these highly specialized, fanciful and elegant riddles, and though appreciative of a catchy problem would be utterly baffled if asked to compose one.

Inspiration of a quasi-musical, quasi-poetical, or to be quite exact, poetico-mathematical type, attends the process of thinking up a chess composition of that sort. Frequently, in the friendly middle of the day, on the fringe of some trivial occupation, in the idle wake of a passing thought, I would experience, without warning, a spasm of acute mental pleasure as the bud of a chess problem burst open in my brain, promising me a night of labor and felicity. It might be a new way of blending an unusual strategic device with an unusual line of defense; it might be a glimpse, curiously stylized and thus incomplete, of the actual configuration of men that would render at last, with humor and grace, a difficult theme that I had despaired of expressing before; or it might be a mere gesture made in the mist of my mind by the various units of force represented by chessmen—a kind of swift dumb show, suggesting new harmonies and new conflicts; whatever it was, it belonged to an especially exhilarating order of sensation, and my only quarrel with it today is that the maniacal manipulation of carved figures, or of their mental counterparts, during my most ebullient and prolific years engulfed so much of the time I could have devoted to verbal adventure.

Experts distinguish several schools of the chess problem art: the Anglo-American one that combines accurate construction with dazzling thematic patterns and refuses to be bound by any conventional rules; the rugged splendor of the Teutonic school; the highly finished but unpleasantly slick and insipid products of the Czech style with its strict adherence to certain artificial conditions; and the mechanical Soviet problem of the so-called "task" type, which replaces artistic strategy by the ponderous working of themes to their utmost capacity. Themes in chess, it may be explained, are such devices as forelaying, withdrawing, pinning, unpinning, and so forth; but it is only when they are combined in a certain way that a problem is satisfying.

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Deceit, to the point of diabolism, and originality, grading into the grotesque, were my notions of strategy, and although in matters of construction I tried to conform, whenever possible, to classical rules, such as economy of force, unity, weeding out of loose ends, I was always ready to sacrifice purity of form to the exigencies of fantastic content, causing form to bulge and burst like a sponge bag containing a small furious devil.

It is one thing to conceive the main play of a composition and another to construct it. The strain on the mind is formidable: the element of time drops out of one's consciousness altogether: the building hand gropes for a pawn in the box, holds it, while the mind still ponders the need for a foil or a stop-gap, and when the fist opens a whole hour, perhaps, has gone by, has burned to ashes in the incandescent cerebration of the schemer. The chessboard before him is a magnetic field, a system of stresses and abysses, a starry firmament. The Bishops move over it like searchlights. This or that Knight is a lever adjusted and tried, and readjusted and tried again, till the problem is tuned up to the necessary level of beauty and surprise. How often have I struggled to bind the terrible force of White's Queen so as to avoid a dual solution! It should be understood that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black but between the composer and the hypothetical solver (just as in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world), so that a great part of a problem's value is due to the number of "tries"—delusive opening moves, false scents, specious lines of play, astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray. But whatever I can say about this matter of problem composing, I do not seem to convey sufficiently the ecstatic core of the process and its points of connection with various other, more overt and fruitful, operations of the creative mind, from the charting of dangerous seas to the writing of one of those incredible novels where the author, in a fit of lucid madness, has set himself certain unique rules that he observes, certain nightmare obstacles that he surmounts, with the zest of a deity building a live world from the most unlikely ingredients—rocks, and carbon, and blind throbbings. In the case of problem composition, the event is accompanied by a mellow physical satisfaction, especially when the chessmen are beginning to enact adequately, in a penultimate re-

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hearsal, the composer's dream. There is a feeling of snugness (which goes back to one's childhood, to play-planning in bed, with parts of toys fitting into corners of one's brain); there is the nice way one piece is ambushed behind another, within the comfort and warmth of an out of the way square; and there is the smooth motion of a well-oiled and polished machine that runs sweetly at the touch of two forked fingers lightly lifting and lightly lowering a piece.

I remember one particular problem I had been trying to compose for months. There came a night when I managed at last to express that particular theme. It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple, "thetic" solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one. The latter would start by falling for an illusory pattern of play based on a fashionable avant-garde theme (exposing White's King to checks), which the composer had taken the greatest pains to "plant" (with only one obscure little move by an inconspicuous pawn to upset it). Having passed through this "antithetic" inferno the, by now ultra-sophisticated, solver would reach the simple key-move as somebody on a wild goose chase might go from Albany to New York by way of Vancouver, Eurasia, and the Azores. The pleasant experience of the roundabout route (strange landscapes, gongs, tigers, exotic customs, the thrice-repeated circuit of a newly married couple around the sacred fire of an earthen brazier) would amply reward him for the misery of the deceit, and after that, his arrival at the simple key-move would provide him with a synthesis of poignant artistic delight.

I remember slowly emerging from a swoon of concentrated chess thought, and there, on a great English board of cream and cardinal leather, the flawless position was at last balanced like a constellation. It worked. It lived. My Staunton chessmen (a twenty-year-old set given to me by my father's Englished brother, Konstantin), splendidly massive pieces of tawny or black wood, up to four and a quarter inches tall, displayed their shiny contours as if conscious of the part they played. Alas, if examined closely, some of the men were seen to be chipped (after traveling in their box through the fifty or sixty lodgings I had changed during those years); but the top of the King's Rook and the brow of the King's Knight still showed a small

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crimson crown painted upon them, recalling the round mark on a happy Hindu's forehead.

A brooklet of time in comparison to its frozen lake on the chessboard, my watch showed half past three. The season was May—around the tenth of May, 1940. The day before, after months of soliciting and cursing, the emetic of a bribe had been administered to the right rat at the right office and had resulted finally in a *visa de sortie* which, in its turn, conditioned the permission to cross the Atlantic. All of a sudden, I felt that with the completion of my chess problem a whole period of my life had come to a satisfactory close. Everything around was very quiet; faintly dimpled, as it were, by the quality of my relief. Sleeping in the next room were my wife and child. The lamp on my table was bonneted with blue sugarloaf paper (an amusing military precaution) and the resulting light lent a lunar tinge to the voluted air heavy with tobacco smoke. Opaque curtains separated me from blacked-out Paris. The headline of a newspaper drooping from the seat of a chair spoke of Hitler's striking at the Low Countries.

I have before me the sheet of paper upon which, that night in Paris, I drew the diagram of the problem's position. White: King on a7 (meaning first file, seventh rank), Queen on b6, Rooks on f4 and h5, Bishops on e4 and h8, Knights on d8 and e6, Pawns on b7 and g3; Black: King on e5, Rook on g7, Bishop on h6, Knights on e2 and g5, Pawns on c3, c6 and d7. White begins and mates in two moves. The false scent, the irresistible "try" is: Pawn to b8, becoming a Knight, with three beautiful mates following in answer to disclosed checks, by Black; but Black can defeat the whole brilliant affair by *not* checking White and making instead a modest, dilatory move elsewhere on the board. In one corner of the sheet with the diagram, I notice a certain stamped mark that also adorns other papers and books I took out of France to America in May, 1940. It is a circular imprint, in the ultimate tint of the spectrum—*violet de bureau*. In its center there are two capital letters of pica size, *"R.F.,"* meaning of course *"République Française."* Other letters in lesser type, running peripherally, spell "CONTROLE DES INFORMATIONS." However, it is only now, a whole decade later, that the information concealed in my chess symbols, which that control permitted to pass, may be, and in fact is, divulged.

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William Phillips

THE NATIVE

It was our first trip to Mexico, and though I was determined to avoid all sight-seeing, which I had always regarded as a form of slavery to one's eyes and feet, Edna and I soon found ourselves trotting day and night from one landmark to another. Using Mexico City as the home base, we made quick thrusts into the surrounding countryside under the illusion that, unlike other North Americans, we were looking for the bona fide natives. It did not take us long to discover that our bold sallies were always on the beaten track, for no sooner had we arrived at some seemingly remote Indian settlement than we found ourselves in a party of fifty tourists, armed with Baedekers, binoculars, cameras, and a contingent of guides, whose only purpose, apparently, was to maintain the fiction that we were exploring the dark interior of the country.

One morning, therefore, after deciding to strike out on our own, we found ourselves on a train bound for Oaxaca. Lying about one hundred and fifty miles south of Mexico City, in the heart of the desert, Oaxaca was a small town, where, we had been told, many of the folkways of the Indians were still preserved. The train, which looked like an elongated trolley car, lumbered along, through endless stops and slowdowns, twisting around the mountain peaks outside of Mexico City, miraculously holding its tracks until it slid down into the flat heat of the desert. Many of the people on the train were poor Mexicans and Indians moving their family and their belongings, most of which were stuffed into large, greasy sacks, to some new home along the way. At lunch, large tortillas were taken out of newspapers, torn into pieces and passed around to each member of the family. Then the mothers, aged and beaten by poverty and the tropical sun that makes them mothers at fifteen and grandmothers at thirty, unconcernedly bared their large, tawny, flaccid breasts and nursed their

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babies. For other functions, each family had its little pot for the younger children. As the train rolled through the hot dust, time became lost in space, and I found myself looking at these worn travelers and wondering whether there was any real distinction between what they were going to and what they were leaving, between their dreams and their sorrows. None of them had the slightest hope of improving his own lot: in fact, the very idea of self-advancement or social progress seemed outside their way of thinking. One old man, who, I suppose, would be regarded in some quarters as socially conscious, had once been in Texas in his youth, and he told me he thought the best thing for Mexico would be annexation by the United States, for then at least the plumbing would be improved.

The train ground into the station at Oaxaca at about seven o'clock, and there we were ceremoniously directed to the only hotel in town. It was a large, rambling structure, that looked like an old castle, full of pride and decay, and it had been converted into a rooming house by the simple device of charging guests for bed and board. We were immediately told by the owner, in a casual tone as though it were one of the facts of life, that there was no running water because something or other was not working, but that we could have little basins for washing. Dinner was the usual exotic combination of foods, some of which were considered edible and others taboo for the foreigners because of the dread disease of dysentery, "the tourist's sickness." I could never understand why we were given such specific instructions about what could and what could not be eaten, since, so far as I could observe, everybody got some kind of dysentery at one time or another. Anyway, each one observed the prohibitions according to his own hypochondria, and left the rest to the laws of nature.

We had been told that there would be a fiesta that night, and right after dinner we went out into the dim streets to hunt for it. I knew that the fiesta was a religious celebration that had retained some of its early forms but had lost much of its original meaning. I was totally unprepared, however, for the modernization the fiesta had undergone, and I thought we were at the wrong place when I saw what looked like an Indian parody of a Fourth of July parade. Men, women, and children were squirming and dancing along the street in a kind of disorderly march, some carrying placards with

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scrawled invocations to their favorite Saint, others holding scratchy, cartoonized drawings of the bleeding Christ or an agonized Virgin Mary. But the real spirit of the fiesta was provided by firecrackers, as roman candles, sparklers, gunpowder caps, and all the rest of the fireworks of a good old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration, fizzed and popped and flashed all around the parade. We walked alongside the paraders for an hour or so, to make sure we were seeing the real thing and not some preliminary festivity or some side show, and we asked as many questions as we knew how to phrase properly. But the answers were all inconclusive, and when we saw the "fiesta" petering out, we dragged ourselves back to the hotel to get some rest for the excursion we had planned the next day to some ruins of an old Indian monument deep in the desert surrounding Oaxaca.

We had been told that the best way to get to the ruins would be to hire a taxi for the day. So, after some maneuvering, we found a man who owned a taxi, and we began the usual bargaining and sparring that have apparently become a ritual of even the smallest Mexican transaction. Everything went fairly smoothly, though, except that our taxi-man wanted some money in advance so that he could buy enough gas for the trip, to which we readily agreed, since we really had no choice in the matter. As we were talking about the gas, however, I noticed that one of the tires was in pretty bad shape, and I decided to examine the other three. They all looked like the kind of tire one picks up in our junk yards, and that is occasionally used for a spare to get us a mile or two to a gas station. But the driver assured us that they were perfectly all right. "Don't worry, there's nothing to worry about," he said, in a jolly, carefree manner, so common among Mexican men. Though we were not sure whether he meant that we would not have any tire trouble, or that it did not matter whether we did or not, we decided to take a chance. We told him we were ready to leave immediately. "One minute," he said, calling to another man, who got into the front seat with him. We wondered why a Mexican taxi needs a co-pilot, but when we asked him he answered with an ambiguous gesture of his hand, and we were off.

We had driven about five miles through scorched, flat country, on a road that looked as though it were melting, when one of the tires popped, the car bounced and came to a standstill. "Now, what are we going to do? I told you this would happen," I said. "Don't

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worry," came the nonchalant reply. The pilot remained behind the wheel, while the co-pilot got out. He picked up a big rock on the side of the road, put it a little ahead of the front axle, and lay down in front of the car under the bumper to hold the rock in place. When he gave the signal to indicate he and the rock were ready, the pilot attempted to drive the car forward so that the axle would rest on the jack. Now I knew what the co-pilot was for: he was simply a human jack, apparently cheaper and more amiable than a mechanical jack. But he was also less efficient, for the two pilots had to make about twenty attempts, during the course of which the co-pilot was bumped on the head by the car or the rock several times, before they succeeded in getting the car jacked up. Finally, they changed the mangled tire and tube, replacing them with a skinny, threadbare spare, that seemed to be in even poorer condition than the original tire had been, and a battle-scarred tube covered with red and black patches. The pilot and the jack grinned with pride, and we were off again.

The next casualty came more quickly. We had gone just about a mile, when another tire blew, and the car lurched and bounced to a standstill again. Not the least bit ruffled, the pilot and co-pilot began to go to work again. But our patience was exhausted by now, and besides, it was becoming clear that this might be a pretty dangerous ride, with no guarantee that the next blowout or the one after would not send the car careening off the road into a tree or down into some deep gorge when we hit the mountainous area. I told the pilot his tires were in a hopeless condition, and that there was no point in our trying to go any further in his car. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders to indicate it was all right with him. At first I thought he was convinced his tires would not stand up, but when he said he thought everything would be fine, though, of course, we could do as we pleased, I realized that it simply made no difference to the course of his life whether he went ahead with us or back to Oaxaca.

Perhaps it would not have made any difference in our lives either, but we were geared to act on the assumption that it did, and we started to walk along the road in the direction of the historic ruins, leaving our two pilots to their lackadaisical fate. We had no plan for reaching our destination, though I suppose being North American meant that our unconscious was counting on getting a hitch. We had walked about a hundred yards when our unconscious

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apparently shifted from its dream of a lift to a yearning for some cooler spot in the shade. The tropical sun was burning as though it had been focused on us by some diabolic lens, and while we were not ready to abandon our project for the day, we felt we had to get to the sidelines to think things over.

As we sat under a tree by the side of the road, debating the hazards and possibilities of making the trip on our own, we noticed a man plowing an adjacent field. I had, of course, heard of primitive methods of farming in more backward parts of the world, but now I found myself shrinking from the shame and the sorrow of seeing an old, bony ox laboring to pull a tree trunk along the ground, and a dark, shrunken man coaxing him from behind with a long switch. The unwieldy plow bumped ahead, inch by inch, getting caught in the earth every few minutes, while the farmer, with an air of timelessness and infinite patience, alternately prodded the ox and disengaged the tree when it got stuck. We watched the farmer and his primitive machine crawl back and forth for about fifteen minutes, wondering how long he could stand the pounding of the sun. Suddenly he stopped, unhitched his ox from the plow, and led it to the shade of a nearby tree. Then he began to walk toward us at the same lethargic pace he had been plowing. His face was darkly gnarled and seamed, like an old apple tree, but it was shining with a steady smile that seemed to bypass his hard, weatherbeaten features. As he approached us we greeted him in Spanish, but he did not reply. Instead he began to gesticulate passionately, like an army signaler with an urgent message, and to talk rapidly in a deep guttural tongue. He kept pointing to his ox and to the field he had been working, his desperate grunts punctuating the insistent movements of his arms.

This continued for five or ten minutes, and, to tell the truth, I was just as bewildered as I was fascinated by his frantic but genial efforts to communicate with us. By this time I had lost all hope of being able to understand him, for it was clear that he knew no Spanish and that he was trying to talk to us in some old Indian dialect. But Edna, who has a talent for comprehending the incomprehensible, seemed to be responding to the rhythm of his gestures and his voice, and her sympathetic smile blended with his in a conversational rapport, as though they had been speaking the same language.

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Finally, Edna turned to me and asked, "Do you understand him?" "No, of course not. Do you?" I said resentfully, hoping to indicate I thought my reaction was a normal one and that anyone who claimed to understand what the Indian farmer was saying was in some way abnormal.

"Why, it's simple," Edna said, "he is trying to tell us how he plows the field. He gets up early in the morning, when the sun is low in the sky and it is still cool, takes his ox out to the field, yokes it to the tree trunk, and begins to plow. He starts at one end, goes to the other end, turns around, goes back again, and so on, back and forth, back and forth. Every little while, he and his ox take a rest, especially as the day grows older and hotter. He unyokes the ox, leads it to a shade tree, where they both get some relief from the sun. In the middle of the day, he feeds the ox some grain and water, while he eats a tortilla. Then they go back to plowing, continuing until nightfall, when he unyokes the ox, and both of them go home. Then he puts the ox out to graze, while he has his evening meal, after which both of them go to sleep."

Throughout Edna's recital of his story, the Indian was grinning triumphantly like a little boy listening to his mother tell his father what he had done that day. He also seemed to have full confidence in his translator. I was still a little piqued by Edna's mastery of the unintelligible, but my irritation was by now completely overshadowed by the awe and compassion I felt before the simple story of the Indian's life. He was now ready to go to work again, and we were set to move on. As we walked to the road and he went back to his ox, we turned and waved to each other, and, until we moved out of sight, he kept turning around and throwing his arms out at us, his face knotted in a permanent grin.

The rest of the day proceeded according to our original schedule. We got a lift in a truck that was going past the place we were headed for. The driver dropped us at the ruins, where we had the lunch prepared for us at the hotel, and then we were led through a maze of ancient caves and walls by an old Indian guide, who, in the course of explaining everything to us, managed to convey his hatred of the Spanish conquerors who murdered and enslaved his people and destroyed their temples and monuments. We were the only visitors that day, and we wandered about for several

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hours, looking at ancient scrolls and stone carvings, until we were numbed and blinded by museum fatigue. And we still had to face the problem of how to get home again.

After a number of inquiries, we discovered that a bus taking workers back to Oaxaca would be leaving soon from a nearby town. We maneuvered another lift on a truck and we got to the bus just on time, which always means, we discovered, at least a half-hour late in that part of Mexico. The motor roared and spat, the bus shook as though it had chills and fever, and we were off.

It was now about six o'clock. The countryside had a dull, hot glaze, like some soft candy that had just been taken out of the oven. As the bus bounced along the parched road, Edna and I kept looking intently out of the window. "Isn't this where we stopped?" I said to her. "No, a little further on." Suddenly Edna poked me. "Here," she said, "there he is." There he was, in his field, plodding along behind the tree trunk and the ox. As they faded in the distance, they looked like a funeral procession moving slowly through the dying day.

Just beyond we looked to see whether our two pilots of the morning were still stranded; but they had apparently managed to get their taxi running, and were probably back in town ready to take a new batch of tourists to the ruins tomorrow. Their mission was accomplished. "You know," I said to Edna, "I bet those taxi-drivers never get anybody to the ruins."

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Randall Jarrell

THE OBSCURITY OF THE POET*

When I was asked to talk about the Obscurity of the Modern Poet I was delighted, for I have suffered from this obscurity all my life. But then I realized that I was being asked to talk not about the fact that people don't read poetry, but about the fact that most of them wouldn't understand it if they did: about the difficulty, not the neglect, of contemporary poetry. And yet it is not just modern poetry, but poetry, that is today obscure. *Paradise Lost* is what it was; but the ordinary reader no longer makes the mistake of trying to read it—instead he glances at it, weighs it in his hand, shudders, and suddenly, his eyes shining, puts it on his list of the ten dullest books he has ever read, along with *Moby Dick, War and Peace, Faust* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* But I am doing this ordinary reader an injustice: it was not the Public, nodding over its lunch-pail, but the educated reader, the reader the universities have trained, who a few weeks ago, to the Public's sympathetic delight, put together this list of the world's dullest books.

Since most people know about the modern poet only that he is obscure—*i.e.,* that he is *difficult, i.e.,* that he is *neglected*—they naturally make a causal connection between the two meanings of the word, and decide that he is unread because he is difficult. Some of the time this is true; some of the time the reverse is true: the poet seems difficult *because* he is not read, *because* the reader is not accustomed to reading his or any other poetry. But most of the time neither is a cause—both are no more than effects of that long-continued, world-overturning cultural and social revolution (seen at its most advanced stage here in the United States) which has made the poet difficult and the public unused to any poetry exactly as it has made poet and public divorce their wives, stay away from church, dislike bear-baiting, free the slaves, get insulin shots for diabetes, and do a hundred thousand other things, some bad, some good, and some indifferent. It is superficial to extract two parts from this world-high whole, and to say of them: "This one, here, is the cause of that one, there; and that's all there is to it."

* A lecture delivered at Harvard University, August, 1950.

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If we were in the habit of reading poets their obscurity would not matter; and once we are out of the habit, their clarity does not help. Matthew Arnold said, with plaintive respect, that there was hardly a sentence in *Lear* that he hadn't needed to read two or three times; and three other appreciable Victorian minds, Beetle, Stalky, and McTurk, were even harder on it. They are in their study; Stalky reads:

> *"Never any.*
> *It pleased the king his master, very late,*
> *To strike at me, upon his misconstruction,*
> *When he, conjunct, and flattering in his displeasure,*
> *Tripped me behind: being down, insulted, railed,*
> *And put upon him such a deal of man*
> *That worthy'd him, got praises of the King*
> *For him attempting who was self-subdued;*
> *And, in the fleshment of this dread exploit,*
> *Drew me on here."*

Stalky says: "Now, then, my impassioned bard, *construez!* That's Shakespeare"; and Beetle answers, "at the end of a blank half minute": "Give it up! He's drunk." If schoolboys were forced to read "The Phoenix and the Turtle," what *would* Beetle have said of these two stanzas?

> *Property was thus appalled*
> *That the self was not the same;*
> *Single nature's double name*
> *Neither two nor one was called,*
>
> *Reason, in itself confounded,*
> *Saw division grow together;*
> *To themselves yet either-neither,*
> *Simple were so well compounded. . . .*

You and I can afford to look at Stalky and Company, at Arnold, with dignified superiority: we know what those passages mean; we know that Shakespeare is never *obscure,* as if he were some modernist poet gleefully pasting puzzles together in his garret. Yet when we look at a variorum Shakespeare—with its line or two of text at the top of the page, its forty or fifty lines of wild surmise and quarrelsome conjecture at the bottom—we are troubled. When the Alexandrian poet Lycophron refers—and he is rarely any simpler—to the *centipede, fair-faced, stork-hued daughters of Phalacra,* and they turn out to be boats, one ascribes this to Alexandrian decadence; but then one remembers that

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Welsh and Irish and Norse poets, the poets of a hundred barbarous cultures, loved nothing so much as referring to the very dishes on the table by elaborate descriptive epithets—periphrases, kennings—which their hearers had to be specially educated to understand. (Loved nothing so much, that is, except riddles.) And just consider the amount of classical allusions that those polite readers, our ancestors, were expected to recognize—and did recognize. If I recite to you, *The brotherless Heliades / Melt in such amber tears as these,* many of you will think, *Beautiful;* a good many will think, *Marvell;* but how many of you will know to whom Marvell is referring?

Yet the people of the past were not repelled by this obscurity (seemed, often, foolishly to treasure it); nor are those peoples of the present who are not so far removed from the past as we: who have preserved, along with the castles, the injustice, and the social discrimination of the past, a remnant of its passion for reading poetry. It is hard to be much more difficult than Mallarmé; yet when I went from bookstore to bookstore in Paris hunting for one copy of Corbière, I began to feel a sort of mocking frustration at the poems by Mallarmé, letters by Mallarmé, letters to Mallarmé, biographies of, essays on, and homage to Mallarmé with which the shelves of those bookstores tantalized me. For how long now the French poet has been writing as if the French public did not exist—as if it were, at best, a swineherd dreaming of that faraway princess the poet; yet it looks at him with traditional awe, and reads in dozens of literary newspapers, scores of literary magazines, the details of his life, opinions, temperament and appearance. And in the Germanic countries people still glance at one with attentive respect, as if they thought that one might at any moment be about to write a poem; I shall never forget hearing a German say, in an objective considering tone, as if I were an illustration in a book called *Silver Poets of the Americas*: "You know, he looks a little like Rilke." In several South American countries poetry has kept most of the popularity and respect it formerly enjoyed; in one country, I believe Venezuela, the president, the ambassador whom he is sending to Paris, and the waiter who serves their coffee will four times out of five be poets. "What sort of poetry do *these* poets write?" is a question of frightening moment for Northern poets; if the answer is, "Nice simple stuff," we shall need to question half our ways. But these poets, these truly popular poets, seem to have taken as models for their verse neither the poems of Homer, of Shakespeare, nor of Racine, but those of Pablo Picasso: they are all surrealists.

Is Clarity the handmaiden of Popularity, as everybody automatically

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assumes? how much does it help to be immediately plain? In England today few poets are as popular as Dylan Thomas—his magical poems have corrupted a whole generation of English poets; yet he is surely one of the most obscure poets who ever lived. Or to take an opposite example: the poems of the students of Yvor Winters are quite as easy to understand as those which Longfellow used to read during the Children's Hour; yet they are about as popular as those other poems (of their own composition) which *grave Alice, and laughing Allegra, and Edith with golden hair* used to read to Longfellow during the Poet's Hour. If Dylan Thomas is obscurely famous, such poets as these are clearly unknown.

When someone says to me something I am not accustomed to hearing, or do not wish to hear, I say to him: *I do not understand you;* and we respond in just this way to poets. When critics first read Wordsworth's poetry they felt that it was silly, but most of them *said,* with Byron, that "he who understands it would be able / To add a story to the Tower of Babel." A few years before, a great critic praising the work of that plainest of poets, John Dryden, had remarked that he "delighted to tread on the brink where sense and nonsense mingle." Dryden himself had found Shakespeare's phrases "scarcely intelligible; and of those which we understand some are ungrammatical, others coarse; and his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions that it is as affected as it is coarse." The reviewers of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," even those who admired it most, found it almost impossible to understand; that it was hopelessly obscure seemed to them self-evident. Today, when college girls find it exactly as easy, exactly as hard, as "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's," one is able to understand these critics' despairing or denunciatory misunderstanding only by remembering that the first generation of critics spoke of Browning's poem in just the terms that were later applied to Eliot's. How long it takes the world to catch up! Yet it really never "catches up," but is simply replaced by another world that does not need to catch up; so that when the old say to us, "What shall I do to understand Auden (or Dylan Thomas, or whoever the latest poet is)?" we can only reply: "You must be born again." An old gentleman at a party, talking to me about a poem we both admired, the *Rubaiyat,* was delighted to find that our tastes agreed so well, and asked me what modern poet I liked best. Rather cutting my coat to his cloth, I answered: "Robert Frost." He looked at me with surprise, and said with gentle but undisguised finality: "I'm afraid he is a little after my time." This happened in 1950; yet surely in 1850 some old gentleman, fond of Gray and Cowper and Crabbe, must have uttered to the young Matthew Arnold the same words,

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only this time with reference to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

We cannot even be sure what people will find obscure; when I taught at Salzburg I found that my European students did not find "The Waste Land" half so hard as Frost's poetry, since one went with, and the other against, all their own cultural presuppositions; I had not simply to explain "Home-Burial" to them, I had to persuade them that it was a poem. And another example occurs to me: that of Robert Hillyer. The first reviews of *The Death of Captain Nemo* that I saw began by complaining that the poem was obscure. I felt as if I had seen Senator McCarthy denounced as a Soviet agent; for how could Mr. Hillyer be obscure?

That the poet, the modern poet, is, understandably enough, for all sorts of good reasons, more obscure than even he has any imaginable right to be—this is one of those great elementary (or, as people say nowadays, *elemental*) attitudes about which it is hard to write anything that is not sensible and gloomily commonplace; one might as well talk on faith and works, on heredity and environment, or on that old question: why give the poor bathtubs when they only use them to put coal in? Anyone knows enough to reply to this question: "They don't; and even if they did, *that's* not the reason you don't want to help pay for the tubs." Similarly, when someone says, "I don't read modern poetry because it's all stuff that nobody on earth can understand," I know enough to be able to answer, though not aloud: "It isn't; and, even if it were, *that's* not the reason you don't read it." Any American poet under a certain age, a fairly advanced age—the age, one is tempted to say, of Bernard Shaw—has inherited a situation in which no one looks at him and in which, consequently, everyone complains that he is invisible: for that corner into which no one looks is always dark. And people who have inherited the custom of not reading poets justify it by referring to the obscurity of the poems they have never read—since most people decide that poets are obscure very much as legislators decide that books are pornographic: by glancing at a few fragments someone has strung together to disgust them. When a person says accusingly that he can't understand Eliot, his tone implies that most of his happiest hours are spent at the fireside among worn copies of the *Agamemnon, Phèdre,* and the Symbolic Books of William Blake; and it is melancholy to find, as one commonly will, that for months at a time he can be found pushing eagerly through the pages of *Worlds in Collision* or *The Cardinal,* where *with head, hands, wings, or feet* this poor fiend *pursues his way, and swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies;* that all his happiest memories of Shakespeare seem to come from a high-school production of

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As You Like It in which he played the wrestler Charles; and that he has, by some obscure process of free association, combined James Russell, Amy, and Robert Lowell into one majestic whole: a bearded cigar-smoking ambassador to the Vatican who, after accompanying Theodore Roosevelt on his first African expedition, came home to dictate from his deathbed the "Concord Hymn." Many a man, because Ezra Pound is too obscure for him, has shut forever the pages of *Paradise Lost;* or so one would gather, from the theory and practice such people combine.

The general public (in this lecture I hardly speak of the happy few, who grow fewer and unhappier day by day; the relative isolation of the American intellectual is as much a disaster for him as it is for his society) has set up a criterion of its own, one by which every form of contemporary art is condemned. This criterion is, in the case of music, melody; in the case of painting, representation; in the case of poetry, clarity. In each case one simple aspect is made the test of a complicated whole, becomes a sort of loyalty oath for the work of art. Although judging by this method is almost as irrelevant as having the artist pronounce *shibboleth,* or swear that he is not a Know-Nothing, a Locofocoist, or a Bull Moose, it is as attractive, in exactly the same way, to the public that judges: instead of having to perceive, to enter, and to interpret those new worlds which new works of art are, the public can notice at a glance whether or not these pay lip-service to its own "principles," and can then praise or blame them accordingly. Most of the music of earlier centuries, of other continents, has nothing the ordinary man can consider a satisfactory melody; the tourist looking through the galleries of Europe very soon discovers that most of the Old Masters were not, representationally speaking, half so good as the painters who illustrate *Collier's Magazine;* how difficult and dull the inexperienced reader would find most of the great poetry of the past, if he could ever be induced to read it! Yet it is always in the name of the easy past that he condemns the difficult present.

Anyone who has spent much time finding out what people do when they read a poem, what poems actually mean for them, will have discovered that a surprising part of the difficulty they have comes from their almost systematic unreceptiveness, their queer unwillingness to pay attention even to the reference of pronouns, the meaning of the punctuation, which subject goes with which verb, and so on; "after all," they seem to feel, "I'm not reading *prose.*" You need to read good poetry with an attitude that is a mixture of sharp intelligence and of willing emotional empathy, at once penetrating and generous: as if you were listening to *The Marriage of Figaro,* not as if you were listening to

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Tristan or to Samuel Butler's Handelian oratorios; to read poetry—as so many readers do—like Mortimer Snerd pretending to be Dr. Johnson, or like Uncle Tom recollecting Eva, is hardly to read poetry at all. When you begin to read a poem you are entering a foreign country whose laws and language and life are a kind of translation of your own; but to accept it because its stews taste exactly like your old mother's hash, or to reject it because the owl-headed goddess of wisdom in its temple is fatter than the Statue of Liberty, is an equal mark of that want of imagination, that inaccessibility to experience, of which each of us who dies a natural death will die.

That the poetry of the first half of this century often *was* too difficult—just as the poetry of the eighteenth century *was* full of antitheses, that of the metaphysicals full of conceits, that of the Elizabethan dramatists full of rant and quibbles—is a truth that it would be absurd to deny. How our poetry got this way—how romanticism was purified and exaggerated and "corrected" into modernism; how poets carried all possible tendencies to their limits, with more than scientific zeal; how the dramatic monologue, which once had depended for its effect upon being a departure from the norm of poetry, now became in one form or another the norm; how poet and public stared at each other with righteous indignation, till the poet said, "Since you won't read me, I'll make sure you can't"—is one of the most complicated and interesting of stories. But Modernism was not "that lion's den from which no tracks return," but only a sort of canvas whale from which prophet after prophet, throughout the late '20's and early '30's, made a penitent return, back to rhyme and metre and plain broad Statement; how many young poets today are, if nothing else, plain! Yet how little posterity—if I may speak of that imaginary point where the poet and the public intersect—will care about all the tendencies of our age, all those good or bad intentions with which ordinary books are filled; and how much it will care for those few poems which, regardless of intention, manage at once to sum up, to repudiate, and to transcend both the age they appear in and the minds they are produced by. One judges an age, just as one judges a poet, by its best poems—after all, most of the others have disappeared; when posterity hears that our poems are obscure, it will smile indifferently—just as we do when we are told that the Victorians were sentimental, the Romantics extravagant, the Augustans conventional, the metaphysicals conceited, and the Elizabethans bombastic—and go back to its (and our) reading: to Hardy's "During Wind and Rain," to Wordsworth's story of the woman Margaret, to Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," to Marvell's "Horatian Ode," to

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Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* to Eliot's *Four Quartets,* and to all the rest of those ageless products of an age.

In this age, certainly, poetry persists under many disadvantages. Just as it has been cut off from most of the people who in another age would have read it, so it has been cut off from most of the people who in another age would have written it. Today poems, good poems, are written almost exclusively by "born poets." We have lost for good the poems that would have been written by the modern equivalents of Elizabeth or Bishop King or Samuel Johnson; born novelists, born theologians, born princes; minds with less of an innate interest in words and more of one in the world which produces words. We are accustomed to think of the poet, when we think of him at all, as someone Apart; yet was there—as so many poets and readers of poetry seem to think—*was* there in the Garden of Eden, along with Adam and Eve and the animals, a Poet, the ultimate ancestor of Robert P. Tristram Coffin? . . . When I last read poems in New York City, a lady who, except for bangs, a magenta jersey blouse, and the expression of Palamède de Charlus, was indistinguishable from any other New Yorker, exclaimed to me about a poet now, alas, middle-aged: "He read like a young god." I felt that the next poet was going to be told that I read like the young Joaquin Miller; for this lady was less interested in those wonderful things, poems, than in those other things, poets—never realizing that it is their subordination to the poems they write that makes them admirable. She seemed to me someone who, because he has inherited a pearl necklace, can never again look at an oyster without a shudder of awe. And this reminds one that, today, many of the readers a poet would value most have hardly learned to read any poetry; and many of those who regularly read his poems have values so different from his that he is troubled by their praise, and vexed but reassured by their blame.

Tomorrow morning some poet may, like Byron, wake up to find himself famous—for having written a novel, for having killed his wife; it will not be for having written a poem. That is still logically, but no longer socially, possible. Let me illustrate with a story. I once met on a boat, traveling to Europe with his wife and daughter, a man with whom I used to play ping-pong. Having learned from a friend that I write poetry, he asked one day with uninterested politeness, "Who are the American poets you like best?" I said, "Oh, T. S. Eliot . . . Robert Frost." Then this man—this father who every night danced with his daughter with the well-taught, dated, decorous attractiveness of the hero of an old *Saturday Evening Post* serial by E. Phillips Oppenheim; who had

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had the best professional in Los Angeles teach his wife and daughter the tennis strokes he himself talked of with wearying authority; who never in his life had gone through a doorway before anyone over the age of seven—this well-dressed, well-mannered, traveled, urbane, educated gentleman said placidly: "I don't believe I've heard of them." For so far as literature, the arts, philosophy and science were concerned, he might better have been the policeman on the corner. But he was perfectly correct in thinking—not that he had ever thought about it—that a knowledge of these things is not an essential requirement of the society of which he is a part. We belong to a culture whose old hierarchy of values—which demanded that a girl read Pope just as it demanded that she go to church and play the pianoforte—has virtually disappeared; a culture in which the great artist or scientist, in the relatively infrequent cases in which he has become widely known, has the status of Betty Grable, or of the columnist who writes that, the night before, he met both these "celebrities" at the Stork Club.

When, a hundred and fifty years ago, a man had made his fortune, he found it necessary to provide himself with lace, carriages, servants, a wife of good family, a ballerina, a fencing master, a dancing master, a chaplain, a teacher of French, a string quartet perhaps, the editions of Pope and Steele and Addison through which he worked a laborious way on unoccupied evenings: there was so much for him to learn to *do,* there in his new station in life, that he must often have thought with nostalgia of the days in which all that he had to do was make his fortune. We have changed most of that: in our day the rich are expected not to do but to be; and those ties, tenuous, ambiguous and immemorial, which bound to the Power of a state its Wisdom and its Grace, have at last been severed.

When Mill and Marx looked at a handful of workingmen making their slow firm way through the pages of Shelley or Herbert Spencer or *The Origin of Species,* they thought with confident longing, just as Jefferson and Lincoln had, of the days when every man would be literate, when an actual democracy would make its choices with as much wisdom as any imaginary state where the philosopher is king; and no gleam of prophetic insight came to show them those workingmen, two million strong, making their easy and pleasant way through the pages of the New York *Daily News.* The very speeches in which Jefferson and Lincoln spoke of their hope for the future are incomprehensible to most of the voters of that future, since the vocabulary and syntax of the speeches are more difficult—more obscure—than anything the voters have read or heard. For when you defeat me in an

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election because you were, as I was not, born and bred in a log-cabin, it is only a question of time until you are beaten by someone whom the pigs brought up out in the yard. The truth that all men are politically equal, the recognition of the injustice of fictitious differences, becomes a belief in the fictitiousness of differences, a conviction that it is reaction or snobbishness or Fascism to believe that any individual differences of real importance can exist. We dislike having to believe in what Goethe called inborn or innate merits; yet—as a later writer more or less says—many waiters are born with the taste of duchesses, and most duchesses are born (and die) with the tastes of waiters: we can escape from the level of society, but not from the level of intelligence, to which we were born.

One of our universities recently made a survey of the reading habits of the American public; it decided that 48 per cent of all Americans read, during a year, no book at all. I picture to myself that reader—nonreader, rather; one man out of every two—and I reflect, with shame: "Our poems are too hard for him." But so, too, are *Treasure Island, Peter Rabbit,* pornographic novels—any book whatsoever. The authors of the world have been engaged in a sort of conspiracy to drive this American away from books; have, in 77 million out of 160 million cases, succeeded. A sort of dream-situation often occurs to me in which I call to this imaginary figure, "Why don't you read books?"—and he always answers, after looking at me steadily for a long time: "Huh?"

If my tone is mocking, the tone of someone accustomed to helplessness, this is natural: the poet is a condemned man for whom the State will not even buy breakfast—and as someone said, "If you're going to hang me, you mustn't expect to be able to intimidate me into sparing your feelings during the execution." The poet lives in a world whose newspapers and magazines and books and motion pictures and radio stations and television stations have destroyed, in a great many people, even the capacity for understanding real poetry, real art of any kind. The man who monthly reads, with vacant relish, the carefully predigested sentences which the *Readers' Digest* feeds to him as a mother pigeon feeds her squabs—this man *cannot* read the *Divine Comedy,* even if it should ever occur to him to try: it is too obscure. Yet one sort of clearness shows the most complete contempt for the reader, just as one sort of obscurity shows the most complete respect. Which patronizes and degrades the reader, the *Divine Comedy* with its four levels of meaning, or the *Readers' Digest* with its one level so low that it seems not a level but an abyss into which the reader consents to sink? The writer's real dishonesty is to give an easy paraphrase of the hard truth. Yet the

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average article in our magazines gives any subject whatsoever the same coat of easy, automatic, "human" interest; every year *Harper's Magazine* sounds more like *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Goethe said, "The author whom a lexicon can keep up with is worth nothing"; Somerset Maugham says that the finest compliment he ever received was a letter in which one of his readers said: "I read your novel without having to look up a single word in the dictionary." These writers, plainly, lived in different worlds.

Since the animal organism thinks, truly reasons, only when it is required to, thoughtfulness is gradually disappearing among readers; and popular writing has left nothing to the imagination for so long now that imagination too has begun to atrophy. All the works of the past are beginning to seem to the ordinary reader flat and dull, because they do not supply the reader's response along with that to which he responds. Boys who have read only a few books in their lives, but a great many comic books, will tell one, so vividly that it is easy to sympathize: "I don't like books because they don't really show you things; they're too slow; you have to do all the work yourself." When, in a few years, one talks to boys who have read only a few comic books, but have looked at a great many television programs—what will *they* say?

On this subject of the obscurity of the poet, of the new world that is taking the place of the old, I have written you a poem—an obscure one. I once encountered, in a book, a house that had a formal garden, an English garden, a kitchen garden, and a cutting garden; through these gardens gentlemen walked in silk stockings, their calves padded like those of Mephistopheles; and I made that cutting garden, those padded calves, my symbols for the past. For the present and the future I had so many symbols I didn't know what to do: they came into the poem without knocking, judged it, and did not leave when they had judged; but the one that summed them all up—that had, for me, the sound of the Last Morning of judgment—was a slogan from a wine advertisement, one that I used to see every day in the New York subways. My poem is called *The Times Worsen*:

If sixteen shadows flapping on the line
All sleek with bluing—a Last Morning's wash—
Whistle, "Now that was thoughty, Mrs. Bean,"
I tell myself, I try: A dream, a dream.
But my plaid spectacles are matt as gouache;
When, Sundays, I have finished all the funnies,
I have not finished all the funnies. Men

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Walk in all day (to try me) without knocking—
My jurors: these just, vulgar, friendly shades.
The cutting garden of my grandmama,
My great-great-great-grandfather's padded calves
(Greeted, at cockcrow, with the soft small smile
Of Lilith, his first morganatic wife)
Are only a tale from E. T. W. Hoffmann.
When Art goes, what remains is Life.
The World of the Future does not work by halves:
Life is that "Wine like Mother used to make—
So rich you can almost cut it with a knife."

The World of the Future! The world where vegetables are either frozen, canned, or growing in the fields; where little children, as they gaze into the television viewplate at the Babes dead under the heaped-up leaves of the Wood, ask pleadingly: "But where was their electric blanket?"; where old books, hollowed-out to hold fudge, grace every coffee-table; where cavemen in grammar school pageants, clad in pelts of raw cotton, are watched by families dressed entirely—except for the Neolite of their shoe-soles—in rayon, cellulose and spun nylon; where, among the related radiances of a kitchen's white-enameled electric stove, electric dishwasher, electric refrigerator, electric washing-machine, electric dryer, electric ironer, disposal unit, air conditioner, and Waring Blender, the homemaker sits in the trim coveralls of her profession; where, above the concrete cavern that holds a General Staff, the rockets are invisible in the sky. . . . Of this world I often think.

I do not know whether, at this point, any of my hearers will feel like saying to me, "But all this is negative. What do you want us to *do* about all this?" If I have sounded certain about "all this," remember that this is the way helpless conviction necessarily must sound, if it knows no other way of writing; all these are conclusions which I have come to slowly and reluctantly, as the world forced them on me. Would that I were one of those happy reactionaries, born with a Greek vocabulary as other children are born with birthmarks or incomes, who at the age of four refuse indignantly to waste on that "humanitarian phantasy of a sentimental liberalism, the Kindergarten," the hours they instead devote to memorizing their catechism! But I had a scientific education and a radical youth; am old-fashioned enough to believe, like Goethe, in Progress—the progress I see and the progress I long for and do not see. So I say what I have said about the poet, the public, and their world angrily and unwillingly. If my hearers say, "But what should

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we do?" what else can I answer but "Nothing"? There is nothing to do different from what we already do: if poets write poems and readers read them, each as best they can—if they try to live not as soldiers or voters or intellectuals or economic men, but as human beings—they are doing all that can be done. But to expect them—by, say, reciting one-syllable poems over the radio—to bring back that Yesterday in which people stood on chairs to look at Lord Tennyson, is to believe that General Motors can bring back "the tradition of craftsmanship" by giving, as it does, prizes to Boy Scouts for their scale-models of Napoleonic coaches; that the manners of the past can be restored by encouraging country people to say *Grüss Gott* or *Howdy, stranger* to the tourists they meet along summer lanes.

Art matters not merely because it is the most magnificent ornament and the most nearly unfailing occupation of our lives, but because it is life itself. From Christ to Freud we have believed that, if we know the truth, the truth will set us free: art is indispensable because so much of this truth can be learned through works of art and through works of art alone—for which of us could have learned for himself what Proust and Chekhov, Hardy and Yeats and Rilke, Shakespeare and Homer learned for us? and in what other way could they have made us see the truths which they themselves saw, those differing and contradictory truths which seem nevertheless, to the mind that contains them, in some sense a single truth? And all these things, by their very nature, demand to be shared; if we are satisfied to know these things ourselves, and to look with superiority or indifference at those who do not have that knowledge, we have made a refusal that corrupts us as surely as anything can. If while most of our people (the descendants of those who, ordinarily, listened to Grimm's Tales and the ballads and the Bible; who, exceptionally, listened to Aeschylus and Shakespeare) listen not to simple or naive art, but to an elaborate and sophisticated substitute for art, an immediate and infallible synthetic as effective and terrifying as advertisements or the speeches of Hitler—if, knowing all this, we say: *Art has always been a matter of a few,* we are using a truism to hide a disaster. One of the oldest, deepest, and most nearly conclusive attractions of democracy is manifested in our feeling that through it not only material but also spiritual goods can be shared: that in a democracy bread and justice, education and art, will be accessible to everybody. If a democracy should offer its citizens a show of education, a sham art, a literacy more dangerous than their old illiteracy, then we should have to say that it is not a democracy at all, but one more variant of those "People's Democracies" which share

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with any true democracy little more than the name. Goethe said: "The only way in which we can come to terms with the great superiority of another person is love." But we can also come to terms with superiority, with true Excellence, by denying that such a thing as Excellence can exist; and, in doing so, we help to destroy it and ourselves.

I was sorry to see this conference given its (quite traditional) name of The Defense of Poetry. Poetry does not need to be defended, any more than air or food needs to be defended; poetry—using the word in its widest sense, the only sense in which it is important—has been an indispensable part of any culture we know anything about. Human life without some form of poetry is not human life but animal existence. Our world today is not an impossible one for poets and poetry: poets can endure its disadvantages, and good poetry is still being written—Yeats, for instance, thought the first half of this century the greatest age of lyric poetry since the Elizabethan. But what will happen to the public—to that portion of it divorced from any real art even of the simplest kind—I do not know. Yet an analogy occurs to me.

One sees, in the shops of certain mountainous regions of Austria, bands of silver links, clasped in the rear like necklaces, which have at the front jeweled or enameled silver plates, sometimes quite large ones. These pieces of jewelry are called *goiter-bands*: they are ornaments which in the past were used to adorn a woman's diseased, enormously swollen neck. If the women who wore them could have been told that they had been made hideous by the lack of an infinitesimal proportion of iodine in the water of the mountain valley in which they lived, they would have laughed at the notion. They would have laughed even more heartily at the notion that their necks *were* hideous—and their lovers would have asked, as they looked greedily at the round flesh under the flaxen pigtails, how anyone could bear to caress the poor, thin, scrawny, chickenish necks of those other women they now and then saw, foreigners from that flatland which travelers call the world.

I have talked about the poet and his public; but who is his public, really? In a story by E. M. Forster called *The Machine Stops,* there is a conversation between a mother and her son. They are separated by half the circumference of the earth; they sit under the surface of the earth in rooms supplied with air, with food, and with warmth as automatically as everything else is supplied to these people of the far future. "Imagine," as Forster says, "a swaddled lump of flesh—a woman, about five feet high, with a face as white as a fungus." She has just refused to go to visit her son; she has no time. Her son replies:

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"The air-ship barely takes two days to fly between me and you."

"I dislike air-ships."

"Why?"

"I dislike seeing the horrible brown earth, and the sea, and the stars when it is dark. I get no ideas in an air-ship."

"I do not get them anywhere else."

"What kind of ideas can the air give you?"

He paused for an instant.

"Do you not know four big stars that form an oblong, and three stars close together in the middle of the oblong, and hanging from these stars, three other stars?"

"No, I do not. I dislike the stars. But did they give you an idea? How interesting; tell me."

"I had an idea that they were like a man."

"I do not understand."

"The four big stars are the man's shoulders and his knees. The three stars in the middle are like the belts that men wore once, and the three stars hanging are like a sword."

"A sword?"

"Men carried swords about with them, to kill animals and other men."

"It does not strike me as a very good idea, but it is certainly original."

As long as these stars remain in this shape; as long as there is a man left to look at them and to discover that they are the being Orion: for at least this long the poet will have his public. And when this man too is gone, and neither the poems, the poet, nor the public exist any longer—and this possibility can no longer seem to us as strange as it would once have seemed—there is surely some order of the world, some level of being, at which they still subsist: an order in which the lost plays of Aeschylus are no different from those that have been preserved, an order in which the past, the present, and the future have in some sense the same reality. Or so—whether we think so or not—so we all feel. People always ask: For whom does the poet write? He needs only to answer, *For whom do you do good? Are you kind to your daughter because in the end Someone will pay you for being?* . . . The poet writes his poem for its own sake, for the sake of that order of things in which the poem takes the place that has awaited it.

But this has been said, better than it is ever again likely to be said, by the greatest of the writers of this century, Marcel Proust; and I should like to finish this lecture by quoting his sentences:

All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying the burden of obligations contracted in a former life; there is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this

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earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good, to be fastidious, to be polite even, nor make the talented artist consider himself obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his body devoured by worms, like the patch of yellow wall painted with so much knowledge and skill by an artist who must for ever remain unknown and is barely identified under the name Vermeer. All these obligations which have not their sanction in our present life seem to belong to a different world, founded upon kindness, scrupulosity, self-sacrifice, a world entirely different from this, which we leave in order to be born into this world, before perhaps returning to the other to live once again beneath the sway of those unknown laws which we have obeyed because we bore their precepts in our hearts, knowing not whose hand had traced them there—those laws to which every profound work of the intellect brings us nearer and which are invisible only—and still!—to fools.

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ART CHRONICLE

CHAIM SOUTINE

Soutine was until recently on the periphery of our attention here in America—not so much disregarded as overlooked. We had got used to thinking of Miró as the only significant new painter to issue directly from the School of Paris after 1918. When Soutine chanced to come into focus he was viewed with respect, only we did not see enough of him. Lately we began to suspect, when we thought of it, that he might be the greatest of the Expressionists since Van Gogh; but we had not seen the right things yet. Two or three pictures and certain parts of other pictures aroused expectations—landscapes and still lifes for the most part, not the more widely known figure pieces. Since I had not been to Merion, outside Philadelphia, to see the hundred or so paintings of his, done mostly before 1923, that are in the Barnes Foundation, the current exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of seventy-five oils representing all periods of his career gave me my first real opportunity to verify those expectations. They were disappointed.

Made manifest are capacities for a great art that went largely unrealized. Soutine aimed for a maximum of expressive intensity and he asked, perhaps, too much of painting. Certainly he paid too little heed to its inescapable requirement of a minimum of decorative organization, without which even easel-pictures must fail of unity. Rembrandt himself —Soutine's model—could not afford to dispense with that minimum, and when he did, even he suffered for it (though I prefer, in most cases, to attribute whatever he seems to lose to darkening by time rather than to his hand and eye). Having less than Rembrandt in the way of craft and culture with which to redeem its absence, Soutine had all the more reason to take pains with the decorative. That he did not do so until near the end of his life, that he showed a sovereign unconcern with it until then, constitutes the source of my disappointment. And I cannot make responsible for it a bias on my part against all anti-decorative, non-Mediterranean conceptions of pictorial art; what Soutine wanted of painting seems to belong too much to the province of poetry or music, and beyond any "art of space."

The altogether extraordinary force of Soutine's touch, as discerned

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in every square inch of the paint that covers his canvases, affords some idea of the scale of his capacities. Coarse and yet sensitive at the same time, that touch is always completely felt. He was one of the most painterly painters there ever were, one of those who succeeded best in converting the substance of pigment into signified emotion. Other painters may have contrived more opulent textures; there may be more sap and juice in the paint of a French master; Van Gogh's brush marks are more articulate and harmonious; but no one has dealt more intimately or expressively with the tactile properties of oil paint—its consistency, grain, weight—and at the same time used them so exclusively for optical effects. Soutine hardly ever used impasto sculpturally, to enrich the tactile surface; it was there for the sake of color, and of color alone, to make it more intense and concrete. The paint matter is kneaded and mauled, thinned, thickened, and rubbed in order to render it altogether chromatic, retinal.

Still, the sheer quality of pigment is only a part of the art of painting. Herein lies an equivocation—as the French would say—of Soutine's art. Like Chagall and Lipchitz, two other artists who migrated to Paris from Jewish Eastern Europe, Soutine received a tremendous impact from the museum art of the West. The shock was all the more traumatic and lasting because it came when he was already mature. This also held true for Chagall and Lipchitz, but they arrived in France in time to be affected by the first excitement of Cubism and their admiration for the museum remained for a long time something apart. Soutine, arriving a few years later, was largely untouched by Cubism and refused, at least in words, to admire anything but the old masters; at first Tintoretto and El Greco caught his attention, later on Rembrandt and Courbet (see Monroe Wheeler's catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art show*). He claimed not to like Van Gogh—or, for that matter, any one later—but, as Mr. Wheeler says, "it seems evident that Van Gogh's late Provençal landscapes must have emboldened him in his early approach. . . ." I would also say that he was influenced in his first Parisian canvases by everything that had happened in advanced French painting between late Impressionism and Cubism, and that by 1919 German Expressionism had contributed its bit too. After all, Soutine was an avant-garde painter and never anything else. Yet his love for the museum was more than a question of detached taste. His dream of the heights of painting saw the declamatory and grandiose design and subject-handling of the

* *Soutine.* By Monroe Wheeler. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with the Cleveland Museum of Art. Distributed by Simon & Schuster. $3.95.

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old masters married to the violent and distorting immediacy of post-Impressionist art, Rembrandt's pathos embodied in the instantaneous response and sensation of Expressionism. Only an outsider and newcomer could think this could be done, only someone arrogant, and hypnotized by the *pompier*'s notion of sublimity, yet committed to the directness of modern art, in spite of himself, by his own instinct for painting. Soutine was not enough at home in the West adequately to criticize its tradition of art for his own purposes as a modern painter and still preserve his admiration for it. He had to be an advanced painter because he was too good and too dedicated to put up with the academy, but he broke his neck as an artist because he persisted nonetheless in striving for an academic ideal of greatness taken at face value. (Just as he took at face value the bohemian liberty—demoralizing for a Jew—which seemed to be unconditionally granted to the artist in the unfeudal West.)

With all his stress on color as the main spokesman of his art, Soutine never gave up entirely the traditional, and academic, reliance on sculptural values of dark and light as the basic armature. However, self-sufficient color—used as it was by Van Gogh, Matisse, and the Fauves—unmodulated according to values and organized by the orchestration of flat, single hues, is incompatible on terms of equality with a pictorial structure conceived in darks and lights; one or the other has to be subordinated or suppressed, as Cézanne found out in the course of his struggle to indicate volume and depth with Impressionist color. Soutine appears to have begun to recognize this only toward the end of his life, when it was already too late. This was the equivocation of his art that was the most immediate cause of its failure to realize itself as form.

His style developed in a circle, or rather spiral, looping back on itself again and again. At the beginning in Paris, between 1913 and 1919, it was already original and personal. The obvious influences are Cézanne, Matisse, Derain (Mr. Wheeler points to Bonnard too) but a rough, headstrong brush warps the contours and agitates the surfaces in an un-French way; the tonality is generally light-brownish, a trifle muddy, perhaps, because the pigment has been wrestled with so hard. The miraculous touch is already there: in the white folds of the "Reclining Woman" of 1917, one of the most successful and, at first sight, conventionally approached pictures of that phase. A flower piece, "Red Gladioli," of 1919 is somewhat conventionally arranged too, but the quiet, burning clarity of its color reveals an extraordinary gift for paint. Both works already suggest that Soutine's art would be best integrated when it was generally kept close to academic principles of design; that his design and, with it, the unity of the given work would

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be most often satisfactorily realized when *consistently* worked out in darks and lights. But only too often he will think simultaneously in terms both of pure color *and* modeling values, and their conflict will disrupt the picture.

In his middle period, which covers roughly the decade of the twenties, Soutine tried most to overpower his medium. He produced a series of landscapes that embody, possibly, the reaction to mountainous country of a man born and brought up on the plains. Towns and hills and trees are piled up on each other topsy-turvy, all of a dark green or brown-dark tan-yellowish cast, with the tones crowded too close together, and too much in general put in. The violence of the will to direct emotion affects the drawing even more than the color, but the distortions are too exclusively and too immediately dictated by feeling and, in evading plastic controls, destroy unity. (The canting and skewing of houses and terrain remind me of German *Jugendstil* illustration as it was practiced, for instance, by Feininger in his youth.) The still lifes of a little later date are more achieved because, again, more conventional—though the reds upon which the painter insists jump out of place almost monotonously. More satisfactory, because quieter and yet just as intense, are the "studies" of dead fowl done in 1925 and 1926; here Soutine remembers the Dutch, Chardin, and Renoir, to his benefit—though I still ask whether any one of these marvelously painted canvases achieves quite enough unity. Most of the famous figure pieces and portraits date from the twenties too. On the whole I find these ambiguous: the intensity of their feeling evokes a response that, while with a value of its own, is not quite fully an aesthetic one (the same applies at times to the pictures of Beckmann, another Expressionist). They are not great painting, whatever else they may be, and one is left with the feeling of a lack. Of all the earlier portraits shown at the Museum of Modern Art the only one to which I would give my full assent is the "Woman in Red" of 1922.

There are, however, other, later paintings. In the thirties Soutine veered closer to the museum, in practice as well as words. In the light of the rest of contemporary advanced art his painting had never been so downright radical anyhow. He had had a new personal vision, but hardly a new plastic one. Like Rouault's and the German Expressionists' —allowance made for his superior gifts—his attempt to impose a personal vision without compromise upon a more or less conventional scaffolding had produced startling results but had not transformed the scaffolding, only wrecked it. Now he began to compromise with it, and his paintings took on a more conventional appearance as his drawing be-

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came less furious and the objects it described more clearly placed in a more outspokenly traditional illusion. It is a gain in my opinion. Soutine had gone more than halfway in the direction of tradition before—in the famous (and bigger than usual for him) "Carcass of Beef" of 1925, which has a complete and unusual unity but suffers, I feel, from an overripe translucency of surface, due to glazing, that makes it a bit too picturesque. (Chagall too has a weakness for the picturesque, but exploited it better at the same time that he suffered more from it as a factor of superficiality.) Now Soutine raises the compromise with tradition to a higher level. The subject may be addressed more conventionally, its poetry made more obvious and impersonal, but the method of the form becomes subtler, more controlled, more refined, and in exchange for the impact of the distortions we receive the more valuable unity of the whole picture. I thought the finest picture at the Museum of Modern Art the "House at Oisème" of 1934, which, however conventional and indebted to Courbet in its approach to the subject, comes off as a triumph of closely modulated and powerfully felt paint. The color is narrower in range than before but precisely for that reason of a more clarified force; tones are no longer clotted together at too widely separated points of the value register. The "Plucked Goose" of 1933 is another unified work that might seem conventional at first but which actually possesses great originality of touch and color: it is a picture best seen from close up. Like the "House at Oisème," it is painted, curiously enough, on a wood panel. Among other pictures at the Museum of Modern Art that I would single out as complete works of art, in contrast to statements of sheer feeling, are the very rich red "Seated Choir Boy" (1930—and also done on wood), the "Boy in Blue" (1929), several of the smaller and later portraits such as the "Concierge" (1935), and "Woman in Profile" (1937), as well as the following landscapes: "Alley of Trees" (1936), "Windy Day, Auxerre" (1939), "Landscape with Reclining Figure" (1942). There is another landscape, "Return from School after the Storm" (1942), that shows two little girls, indicated as tiny blobs in the first two of the three landscapes just mentioned, hurrying toward the foreground along a path through open fields. I find this picture exceedingly moving, especially in the figure of the little girl on the right, without liking it altogether as art. The contradiction contains *in nuce* the problem raised by most of Soutine's work.

Mr. Wheeler, in his valuable catalogue, writes that Soutine's growing mastery of his craft in the thirties was accompanied by gradual boredom and fatigue; that the most powerful factor in his art having been "his ghastly anxiety lest the power and skill of his brush fail to

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fulfill the vision in his mind's eye," now "in the increase of facility, his zeal to work diminished; brilliance of style took away some of his incentive." Was it that the approach of full mastery brought home to the artist the recognition that painting, as long as it remained art, could never transcribe one's emotion in all its immediate, "existential," extra-aesthetic truth? Art demands of the artist that he censor or immolate a good part of his feeling for the very sake of art—in the public interest, as it were. Art is ultimately social, its medium social-ness incarnate. Soutine may have felt an unconscious sense of defeat as it dawned upon him that bohemian individualism could not be literally and completely acted out in art. That to try to do so meant the destruction of the quality of form which is its essence and reality. And that he had bought his "brilliance of style" by renouncing the fullness of his ambition and emotion. Maybe this caused him to despair. I think something similar motivated Rimbaud when he gave up writing.

Clement Greenberg

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LITERARY PORTRAITS

A SENSE OF FAULKNER

So far, Nobel Prize or not, Faulkner has remained Faulkner. Anyone who knows him a little knows that he could not be changed by the money, the honors, the recognition, or even by the French press. Here is a recent example of how Faulkner remains Faulkner. Just before he came up to New York, from where he was to fly to Stockholm, he had Mrs. Faulkner telephone Saxe Commins, his good friend and editor (if he could be said to have an editor). The voice from Mississippi: "Bill wants you to buy him a dress suit." The voice in New York: "How can I? I don't know Bill's measurements." The voice from Mississippi: "I'll just give them to you now." While Commins held the phone, Faulkner's wife measured Faulkner up, from cuff to waist and so on.[1]

There is next to nothing (if nothing is too strong a word) in Faulkner that is corruptible. But he is also complex and complicated and sensitive and thoughtful and brooding—factors that are very often missing when one thinks of an incorruptible man. It is this conjunction of disparate elements that is impressive: he contains many of the characteristics that force men into confusion and compromise, but he himself acts with simplicity and conducts himself without compromise.

Often, men initially impress themselves through some one characteristic. The impact of a first meeting with T. S. Eliot is one of friendliness; with E. M. Forster, of shyness; with Evelyn Waugh, of impudence; with W. H. Auden, of abstraction; with Elizabeth Bowen, of vigor; with Marcel Aymé, of disinterestedness; with Dylan Thomas, of a puzzled violence. After several meetings, the single characteristic tends to lose its initial, exaggerated definition, and to take its proper, less conspicuous place in a constellation of qualities. In Faulkner one is struck first by a sense of intactness; and after, even long after, it is still there as sharply defined as at first; it is never diminished, never tamed back into the constellation.

The facts of Faulkner's early life are known. Born in Mississippi, near Oxford (or Jefferson; they have become interchangeable), in 1897. Schooling regular up to his tenth or eleventh year; after that, it is

1. Faulkner's Nobel Prize suit was not bought; it was rented.

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sporadic: he puts in appearances at the high school only now and then, and later at the university in Oxford for a few courses. He joins the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War I, is shot down twice, is wounded, and returns to Oxford after the Armistice. He takes different jobs, house painter, night watchman, post-office clerk, even travels up to New York (at Stark Young's invitation) where he works in a book shop.

New York disturbs him and he returns quickly to Oxford (later he is to say about New York: "I feel the stone and steel weighing down on me and closing me in. Remember, I'm a farmer."); restless, and not doing anybody any good, he goes to New Orleans. It is a crucial time and, as it happened, a crucial place. Though to hear Faulkner tell it, nothing really happened; there is not the slightest hint in his story of the miracle of crystallization that in effect did occur.

In New Orleans, Faulkner used to see Mrs. Sherwood Anderson (he had known her in Mississippi). One day he asked her what her husband's business was. When she told him, he was impressed. He said: "You have a pretty good life when you're a writer. You write in the morning, you walk around the town in the afternoon and see the sights, you eat and drink in the evening, and you see your friends at night. Now, that's good." Mrs. Anderson didn't see Faulkner for quite a stretch after that; and then one day she did, and she asked him where he'd been keeping himself. "I've been writing a book," he said. It was *Soldier's Pay*. When it was finished, Sherwood Anderson said he'd send it to his publisher, providing he didn't have to read it. That suited Faulkner. ("I was pleased," he says, recalling Anderson's offer.) Apparently he didn't believe the novel had an existence other than that it had been written (or he simply had forgotten about it); because, soon after, he crossed the Atlantic on a cattle boat. It was while he was knocking around France that he learned he had become an official author.

But it launched him, launched a career that in so many ways typifies the main line of the American creative impulse. He shares with it its most distinctive features: isolation, introspection, moralism, an obsessive and compulsive need to work things out by himself, without concession, in his own time, out of his own cadence, through his own syntax. Considering, too, that he is a busy man—he runs his own, good-sized farm—he has written a considerable amount, most of which holds up powerfully and lives by itself. Undeniably, things "get done" on a farm, not only the chores but the reading and writing too. Incidentally, it seems noteworthy to point out to what an engaging extent Faulkner has

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applied his dictum on a writer's life: he once wrote in the morning, oversaw his farm (generally on horseback) in the afternoon (though, if that day the farm was running under its own momentum, he would go hunting or fishing), and saw his friends at night, sometimes for quiet drinking and a game of cards. Now he writes when he feels like it, missing days and even weeks, sometimes writing for whole days at a time.

Because Faulkner seldom makes a public pronouncement, because he infrequently appears in those centers where he is most appreciated, and because he lives in a remote and private way, macabre tales have been told about him, fantastic statements have been attributed to him, and characteristics have been lent him that he cannot honestly claim. It is difficult to demonstrate where the reality ends and the myth begins. This much is worth bothering about: it is grotesque to speak of Faulkner as illiterate, as it is absurd to say that he is arrogant, or rude, or violent, or that his simplicity is a pose.

To take these absurdities one at a time, *illiteracy*: Faulkner has read in an unco-ordinated way but he has read a great deal and he has read exactingly; he is an intensive reader, going over one thing that interests him many times (the Testaments, Shakespeare). As a young man he read, he says, everything and anything he could lay hands on. He read all of Balzac in a week. ("I was in Paris with those people during that week," he says.) He read the Russians in the same concentrated way. He is informed enough (a writer shouldn't be too informed), and combines to a remarkable degree, as Eliot said about de Gourmont, "sensibility . . . sense of fact and sense of history, and generalizing power."

Arrogance and rudeness: On the contrary. He is courteous, a gallant in the Southern manner, though this gallantry is personalized and slightly satiric, and, all in all, the manner is engaging in the extreme. At times, say at a small party when he feels at home, he is even cavalierly playful. He is at all times profoundly, meaningfully, considerate.

Violence: Surely everyone has acted violently at one time or another, but an act of violence doesn't characterize a man as violent, just as an experience of isolation doesn't characterize a man as a solitary. What is mistaken for violence is an intensity in Faulkner that is felt but which is manifested only in a poised equilibrium. What is something else again is anger; he can get angry. Once, for example, a proofreader broke up one of Faulkner's typical parenthetical statements that ran on for at least twenty inches. Faulkner offered this reproof to the proofreader on the margin of his proofs: "Goddam you, just don't touch it." Faulkner is gentle; anyone gentler would be embarrassing.

Simplicity as a pose: The famous Hollywood episode (Faulkner

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sitting around in a Hollywood office and saying couldn't he work at home, and the executives saying yes, thinking he meant his apartment in Hollywood, but Faulkner meaning Oxford, Miss., and going home really), is an example of Faulkner's innocence and simplicity.

And there was the time he was leaving New York for Oxford. Shaking hands, he said to me: "Write me a letter. Don't write me about how you are and about how I'm feeling. Write me a letter that says something. Ask me a question. You tell me you're interested in *The Bear*. Well, ask me questions about *The Bear*, specific questions. Ask me something that matters." (When I remarked that I understood he didn't open his mail, he replied, eyes twinkling yet he himself immensely serious, "I know what to open.")

Though this rejoinder may be interpreted as part of a performance, of a stance, I accept it for what I believe it to be—a joke, issuing from the uncomplicated fact that Faulkner does open some letters and not others. It is a summing up of an experience, a dry humor that is related to the speech of men who work farms from Maine to Florida. Faulkner's humor, as a matter of fact, has been overlooked; though after the superb joke that ends *Intruder in the Dust* (or for that matter the joke, the terrible joke, that ends *The Old Man*) it would be sheer perversity to deny it. His somewhat amused outlook was witnessed by Saxe Commins at a football game. Faulkner, Commins says, predicted the right play at a particularly subtle and crucial moment in the game. He congratulated Faulkner, saying, "From now on you'll always be known as the grandstand quarterback." To which Faulkner demurred, "No, I'll always be known as the corncob man."

There is a quality in Faulkner that is difficult to get hold of, that is most disconcerting, even when you know him. What I think it is (though I am never sure) is simply a deep neutrality in Faulkner (recalling by its oppositeness Nietzsche's remark that perhaps all vulgarity consists in man's inability to resist stimuli); a waiting and a listening and a seeing that is neither friendly nor unfriendly, neither encouraging nor discouraging.

Henry Green told me during his recent visit here that the one man he wanted most to have read his work was Faulkner, adding, "He's the one man I'd like to meet more than anyone else in America." (How strange, how much like Green's own fiction: Faulkner, who had not been to New York more than a half dozen times in half a century, was due to arrive that day.) When Green and Faulkner met a few nights later, they were together for about twenty uninterrupted minutes. This was the picture: Faulkner, small, wiry, relaxed and yet alert, silent,

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except for a word now and then spoken in a rich, very soft inflection; Green, tall and slender, instinctively crouching so that he wouldn't tower over Faulkner. He told Faulkner about England, about the places where he'd hunted and fished. The more Faulkner merely listened, the more nervously Green talked. Green told me afterward (while he wiped his brow) that it had been a very difficult twenty minutes. Nevertheless he had been delighted by Faulkner, no question about it.

I think something similar obtained for Lionel Trilling. A German, who had been in a concentration camp, was in touch with Trilling about a paper he was writing devoted to Faulkner's short stories. The German was planning to write Faulkner, and Trilling hoped Faulkner would answer the letter. As Faulkner listened in his polite and masked way, Trilling apparently felt compelled to go into more and more detail. So that when, at the end of a graceful but somewhat tortuous explanation, Faulkner replied, "Yes, I will answer the letter," his simple directness was so unexpected and incongruous that all of us, including Trilling, burst into laughter.

Faulkner's innate consideration is part of a humanity that extends to animals. Of all animals, his first and true love is the mule. He says it is the most intelligent animal and the most maligned. He believes the mule's so-called balkiness is in reality a considered judgment. "They have thought it out," he says, "and they see no sense in going on." It is of extreme interest to me that he once told a friend his dream was to write a *Moby Dick* of mules. Faulkner, to my mind, has written his *Moby Dick,* except that the whale was a bear instead of a mule. Faulkner's bear in *The Bear* can be placed alongside Melville's whale. Not only has Faulkner written an equally memorable poem to a mammal; it is more closely related than that. Faulkner's bear resembles Melville's whale. Both convey an anthropomorphic nuance; their aspects are touched with human cunning, wisdom, malevolence and sometimes benevolence, and they seem to be aware of human relationships; they are both unique in their own mammalian kingdoms; and the initial sighting of bear and whale are kindred: the scars and wounds in both are hideously visible, and the ineffectual weapons too: the shot in the one and the harpoon heads in the other.

(A deviation and a footnote: In *The Bear,* young McCaslin, through a sense of love and history and identification, passes up his chance to shoot the bear. Faulkner says one of the happiest experiences he has had came about when a dozen hunters, himself included, tracked a buck for twenty-four hours, only to have the animal outwit them in the end.)

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More on animals: Once, at the home of Ruth Ford (a fellow-Mississippian and an old friend), Faulkner, on entering, found two totally strange animals in the room (they were cavies; I believe of the rodent family). I wasn't too keen on handling them, but Faulkner involved me in his impromptu experiments, very quiet ones that he conducted almost from the moment we sat down. He peered down their throats, examined their toes, kept one behind his back in order to find out how the other reacted to the disappearance. He carried these experiments forward on a secondary plane as it were, so that none of us were disturbed in our talk. He knew considerably more about cavies than I did, or than his hostess did for that matter, when we left.

Faulkner has an astonishing loyalty toward his own generation of writers. During the time that Hemingway's *Across the River* was making its appearance in installments, we were in a taxi with a young and well-known writer who, not being used to Faulkner's restful silences, launched an attack on the Hemingway installment he had just read, finding in it not a solitary virtue. Faulkner interrupted him. "Young man," he said rather sharply, "I haven't read this new one. And though it may not be the best thing Hemingway ever wrote, I know it will be carefully done, and that it will have quality." It was an effective silencer.[2]

His loyalty toward his own generation isn't a blind or sentimental belief. He has his reasons. He believes the present is a machine age which, though it has not destroyed the writers, is destroying their material. That material is being dehumanized. What appears in contemporary fiction are types, categories, struggling not against the verities of the heart, which are honor and duty and pride and cowardice (they cannot struggle against these since they don't know what these are and are kept from knowing them); they struggle against the categories they are forced into by a well-intentioned society that wants to make room for everybody. He believes that his own people in time, Hemingway, Wolfe, Dos Passos, were free of this fate, as were Anderson, Dreiser and Willa Cather ("the real ones before us," he says).

Now, this criticism of an age, and this solidarity with the one just preceding it, doesn't mean that Faulkner is some sort of a cranky man ranting against his time. Not at all. He is extremely alert to our time, to the political situation (and though the political ideas in *Intruder*

2. Katherine Anne Porter told an analogous story. She was on a drive with Sherwood Anderson. A young writer was there too, and his object of attack was Dreiser. Anderson had the car stopped. "Get out, young man," he said. When they got started up again, minus the writer, Anderson said to Miss Porter: "We know what's wrong with Dreiser, only that arrogant young bastard can't tell us."

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have been severely criticized, I find them serious, flawed, and extraordinarily moving). When he takes a trip (and though he was an aviator, one no longer associates him with flying), he flies because it is the fastest way to get there. And he would use any modern invention from television to psychoanalysis, if he needed it. For Faulkner, vast cities, planes, radios, cinemas, factories, automobiles are aspects of contemporary life. He feels it is absurd to be intimidated or enthralled by any of it, that people should merely use these things, make use of them as the facilities they are.

This is precisely the point for Faulkner, who, though insulated, is most modern. These are things, inventions, tools, instrumentalities, gadgets, and neither virtue nor evil resides in them. They are to be used today as yesterday mules were used and stereopticans enjoyed. He believes these things should not dominate his life, nor shape his thought, nor direct his vision. And he sees to it that they don't. Faulkner is an un-Marxian man who believes in choice.

A final note: When Faulkner arrived at the airport here before taking off for Stockholm, a reporter met him and asked him what he thought was the most decadent thing in America (Faulkner writes decadent stories). He said, "What you're doing, Miss." Knowing Faulkner's profound wish to remain anonymous, I told him I had written about him. He looked at me a little sadly, and very quietly said, "I can't tell you what to do, Harvey. That's for you to say." My conscience isn't altogether at ease yet.

Harvey Breit

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PARIS LETTER

I am writing this piece on a desk which I had to buy two years ago at the flea-market, because the object you are most unlikely to find in a Parisian furnished flat (or a hotel room, for that matter) is a comfortable desk, that is, a surface stable enough to stand the thumping of the typewriter, and sufficiently large to allow for a minimum of disorder: the blank paper, a couple of magazines, the ashtray and the cigarettes. I need a pencil to mark something down I want to include in this "letter," I open the right-hand drawer, and I am seized by a familiar feeling of nausea: there are three or four pencil stubs, a piece of seersucker material, blotting paper, envelopes, a couple of those tiny notebooks from the 42nd Street Five and Ten. In a few days, all this will have to be collected and packed together with the rest of our odds and ends. We have to move, for the third time in twelve months. The first time it was because of the greed of a high-class bitch, who had found an American diplomat willing to pay three times as much as we did for the flat. The second time the separation was amiable and agreed upon in advance. This time, it is the City of Paris itself that forces us out. Nothing doing. It is written in the statutes: no subletting. We are subletting, of course, like two-thirds of the foreigners who have come to Paris after the war (the other third being made up of those who can afford to buy a place, or pay a lot of money for the *pas de porte*—"the keys," that is). We are in a flagrant state of delinquency, and even more so is the old lady who was counting on the money we gave her every month to pay for her room and board, and who now will have an apartment, and no board, while we shall have to look frantically for another opportunity to commit the same offense.

The case is pure. No individual greed is involved. There will be no profit for anybody, except for the prestige of the written rules of the H.B.M., the Habitations Bon Marché, an institution founded by the City of Paris in 1920, at a time when the Administration was not so administrative and, in addition to enforcing rules, built a number of moderately priced apartment houses. Strict rules were then set forth, and never suspended or modified thereafter. It has merely become impossible to find a place to live without violating some law. But: *Lex Vincit Tempus,* says threateningly the inscription carved on the building of the Police Judiciaire, Quai des Orfèvres. We shall move out.

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This business of moving in and out gives me nausea, as though I were living on some wretched boat, and not in this most lovable city. I have no desire to write, or read, or talk, or do anything at all, except lie down on the couch and dream of wilderness: Arizona, Lower California, Patagonia. But even Long Island would do, or any place that were at least fifty miles from the crowds—and the rules. I wonder why I am living in Paris at all. What do I get out of it?

I get the *Figaro* every morning, plus another paper, preferably a leftist one, to strike the balance and puzzle the onlookers, since the paper you buy in Paris is not just a paper, but also a flag and an insignia. I used to get *Combat*. But *Combat*'s third reincarnation, under Louis Pauwels, is so discolored, that I now get the *Aurore* and *Franc-Tireur,* by turns. The first gives me the best crime reportage, much better than the *Daily Mirror*'s in dramatic value. Two of them, lately, were excellent.

One was the story of the *machine à étrangler*. A *rentière* in her fifties had rented a villa she owned in the Midi to a Monsieur in his late forties. The Monsieur was *très bien,* since he paid a high rent with admirable regularity. One day, he sent the lady a letter offering to buy the villa. The *rentière* was enchanted, and went to talk things over with the gentleman right away. They met in the *salon,* debated the price, agreed. Then Monsieur took out of a drawer the *machine à étrangler*. The contraption was both simple and ingenious: it consisted of the revolving drum of a Colt to which a piece of steel wire of a convenient length was attached. Monsieur explained to Madame how the thing worked: the wire was passed in the form of a noose around the throat of the patient, then in the proper way around his arms and chest, the length of the whole, and especially of the noose, being automatically controlled by the revolving drum in such a way as to strangle the person in question as soon as a certain peg had been reached. Keeping the upper part of his body extremely tranquil, except for breathing, was vital for a person wearing such an ornament. Clear?

And now would Madame mind following Monsieur out in the garden? In the garden was a shack, all padded inside. There Madame remained locked for three days, without food or drink. The third day Monsieur came back, and proceeded to the application of the *machine à étrangler* to Madame's exhausted body. Thereafter, the poor *rentière* appears to have become nothing but an inert instrument of the criminal's plans. She was forced to call up her lawyer and instruct him to send all her stocks and bonds to the bank; then, still chained to her torturer, she had to go to the bank, sell her property, and collect the money. After which the couple went to a restaurant, where the inventor of the strang-

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ling machine had a good lunch while his victim didn't dare move a finger. Finally, the two went back to the villa, where Madame was, at last, released from the fearful shackles, sworn to secrecy, and set free, while Monsieur just stayed. Back home at her sisters', the poor woman remained dumb for two days. The third day, the truth burst from her lips. The police went to the villa, found the gentleman and his machine, took both away. A few days later, the inventor of the *machine à étrangler* committed suicide in his cell by hanging himself with his bedsheets.

Many aspects of this story seem to me typically French: the laborious cleverness of the conception; the ingenuity that went into the construction of the crazy homemade gadget; the rigorous simplicity, and even cleanliness, of the execution. But, above all, the story is a little masterpiece of sadistic imagination. No physical violence was employed at any moment, only psychological terror. The problem was how to crush a woman's will in order to achieve a definite purpose. It was solved successfully. If, as some people might suspect, sexual charm and seduction were used to bolster the prestige of the diabolical machine, that was not against the rules, was it?

The second story is about the dangers involved in trespassing on French property. The proprietor of one of those *petites villas* that make up so large a part of the *banlieue* of Paris, and of which the equal in bare ugliness exists nowhere on earth, realized, on one of his week-end visits to his domain, that the house, *his* house, the painfully acquired appurtenance of his Ego, had been violated by burglars, or one should rather say: intruders, since nothing serious was missing, except some *aperitif* in a bottle. Three soiled glasses on a *tabouret,* and some mud on the carpet, bore witness to the defilement. The following week, the same profanation had obviously been repeated. One can easily imagine the rage of the insulted proprietor, alone in his desecrated home, hissing like an infuriated cobra at the phantoms of those three bums. The fact is that he went out, bought a bottle of Pernod and a good dose of strychnine, poured the strychnine into the Pernod, and left for Paris and his office desk. The third week, he had the satisfaction of seeing the usual three soiled glasses on the *tabouret,* and the Pernod bottle half empty near them. Triumphantly, he went to the police to tell them that if they wanted to arrest three roaming burglars, all they had to do was to look in the Paris hospitals for cases of poisoning by strychnine. One of the delinquents was thus discovered. He was one of those wretched Algerians who starve and sometimes also rob and kill in the streets of Paris. He was dying.

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Newspaper reports of the occurrence were remarkable in that most of them did not seem to consider that, by pronouncing the death penalty against the drinkers of his Pernod, and by applying it on his own, the worthy *petit propriétaire* had clearly gone beyond the limits of the legitimate defense of his property. Only *Franc-Tireur* published a humanitarian protest against such excesses. But, after all, has not a *propriétaire,* in his own house, the right to put strychnine, or curaro, or hellfire, if he wishes, in his own Pernod? And can any power on earth restrain the passion aroused in a French heart by the violation of his own individual right to private pleasure, private property, and privacy unlimited?

Every evening I read *Le Monde,* easily the best newspaper in continental Europe. *Le Monde* has taken the place of *Le Temps.* The difference between the two papers is symptomatic indeed. *Le Temps* was the organ of the Quai d'Orsay and the Comité des Forges, well informed, austere, and corrupt. Deciphering its editorials required a preliminary period of training in reading between the lines. If you graduated from it, *Le Temps* would give you a daily glimpse into the secrets of the powers that be. During the fever that preceded Munich, and in 1939-1940, if one had not been carried away by emotions, and just reasoned on the assumption that *Le Temps* did indeed represent official France, one could have predicted step by step the behavior of the French ruling class up to Pétain. *Le Monde* is a very different kind of paper. It is a liberal Catholic organ, and rather on the intellectual side at that, as is shown by the fact that some of its most important comments on current events (those on "neutrality" in particular) were written by Etienne Gilson, the Thomist scholar. It does not exactly represent either the Quai d'Orsay or vested interests, or, for that matter, the high bourgeoisie, although, of course, it is perfectly respectful of all these institutions. If it is the organ of a class, *Le Monde* is, or means to be, the organ of the intellectual part of the bourgeoisie: professors, professional men, cultivated business people, and also a certain fringe of the ruling class, temperate, but nevertheless critical of present policies. Its editorials summarize a topical question rather than express a definite opinion on it. Not having a fixed policy, *Le Monde* can let a variety of opinions express themselves in its columns. The range of this variety, however, is revealing. Hence, the publication of Gilson's articles on neutrality was significant indeed. And so was that of a number of strong criticisms of the Indo-China policy. Finally, *Le Monde* is the organ of a liberal bourgeois opposition which is dissatisfied with the present state of affairs while perfectly aware that it has no immediate solution to offer. Hence, it waits,

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it sees, and, from time to time, it lets go of certain trial balloons, like those on neutrality, and against rearmament. The moods of this opposition deserve to be watched attentively, because they are much more serious than, let's say, Monsieur Moch's proposals on German rearmament. In any case, *Le Monde* is a civilized paper. It goes very well with the Fourth Republic, which is the first of the four where the republican principle itself goes unchallenged, but also the first that has no conquering faith, and no vision of the future. Hence, some people feel it should at least stick to reasonableness and dignity of style.

But neither the newspapers nor the level of political life; neither the literary magazines nor literary and artistic life would be sufficient reasons to remain in Paris for more than a few weeks. I am stuck here, that is the truth. I am stuck because I can't get rid of the thought, conceived many years ago, that if something unexpectedly human happens in history, it must either happen here, or find here its true significance, its most appropriate dramatic form. That's it. I am fascinated by the French stage, by the way the French, all of them, from the concierge to the Sorbonne professor and the famous actress herself, act out the comedy of life. Everyone with complete conviction and with nothing held back, always in the limelight, everyone demanding the same fidelity to the role from himself and from the whole cast, and everyone suppressing ruthlessly the superfluous, any impulse that does not fit into the plot as it develops. Looked at from a certain angle, French civilization appears as a fabric woven of three main threads: the School, the Bureau, and the Theater. Everything that has to do with knowledge and the formation of the individual belongs to the School. Everything that concerns material life is taken care of by bureaucratic order. The Theater is the final result, embracing all that pertains to social life, and to life *tout court*. It is the most important part, the ultimate test of the whole.

Having observed the French play the comedy of life with a seemingly total absence of innocence, serious persons have again and again repeated that the French are a frivolous people, all artifice and insincerity. And it might well be true, in the sense that artifice and insincerity might be the price the French pay for their virtues, just as other people get crudity and muddle in exchange for their spontaneity. If the French are wrong, however, they are wrong in a very big way. Taking life as a play in which one is called to impersonate remorselessly a role entirely his own is a very serious and very radical attitude. It means to be thoroughly committed, but with a vengeance that is human. The only serious objection is that comedy will inevitably be the result, never tragedy. At least, not tragedy in the Sophoclean sense. Also, a certain kind of wonder

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is dispelled, since the meaning of the whole show is somewhat taken for granted, so that one can proceed with the plot, as it were.

Marivaux has been the fashion in Paris for some time, both at Barrault's and at the Comédie Française. Now, I am afraid, the vulgarization has come, with Anouilh's latest play *La Repétition ou L'Amour Puni*. It is the music-box perfection of Marivaux's plays, in fact their rigorous thinness, that attracts the contemporary spectator. There is more substance than that, however, and more poetry, in Marivaux's eighteenth-century chit-chat. In a review of *Les Sécondes Surprises de l'Amour*, Thierry Maulnier attempted a parallel between Marivaux and Choderlos de Laclos, and went so far as to mention Sade. Marivaux, it seems to me, is neither cynical nor cruel. But he is pitiless in that he cares only for the rules of the game and for grace. The game is life, and it cannot but take the form of a play, since its rules concern polite society, and it states that as soon as a sensitive person (one who is supposed to be motivated by feeling, desire and love of life; notice, not of the social scene) begins to express himself, he starts a plot of whose development he is not the master, a game whose rules he must obey to the last, if he wants to win, or rather: to be happy. The most charming show now on at the Comédie Française is Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance*. It is the quintessence of Marivaux. The play is about Harlequin and Sylvia, who are young and in love, a real, natural, absolute love. But do they know what they have started by being in love? They don't. They think the plot of life begins and ends with their mutual love. It is their only fault, and it is sweetly punished in the end by Sylvia's falling in the arms of the Prince and Harlequin's embracing Flaminia. It all began with love, and went from love to love. The same tune, but, from variation to variation, another melody was born.

I wonder whether, listening to Marivaux, Hamlet would mutter "Words, words, words."

As for Anouilh's play, it is modern *marivaudage* around Marivaux. Some highly improbable, although entirely up to date, people in a *château* are staging *La Double Inconstance* for the entertainment of their neighbors. While they are rehearsing, the same plot that develops musically and sweetly in Marivaux takes place harshly, and with all sorts of jarring nastiness, among the "real" characters. It is a highly polished piece of theatrical work, clever, shrewd, witty, and everything, but much less spirited and inventive than Anouilh's previous plays, and finally pointless because so much more pretentious.

Nicola Chiaromonte

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THEATER CHRONICLE

THE SPOILS OF THE SEASON

In a fairly brisk and excited autumn season, Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* continued its unexpected run, promising to become the highbrow *Harvey*. Meanwhile Christopher Fry threatens to supplant Eliot as the man to bring about the long-expected marriage between modern poetry and the popular stage. Fry is author of one play now on Broadway, *The Lady's Not for Burning,* and translator of another, *Ring Round the Moon.* And of the two his own play has been the greater success so far. With its first-rate cast (John Gielgud and Pamela Brown), its fifteenth-century setting, its blank-verse medium, its story of a misanthropic ex-soldier who wants to be hanged and a life-loving girl who, condemned as a witch, insists on being spared, *The Lady's Not for Burning* got an astonishing press in New York as it had done in London where it originated. All varieties of taste appear to have been gratified by it; even so vigilant a critic of the precious as Wolcott Gibbs was reduced to a state of nervous half-consent.

By comparison my own response to *The Lady's Not for Burning* was less happy. I don't know whether the play actually claims to be robustly Elizabethan. To me it is a question, not whether the play is really robust but whether it is alive at all. And it seems to be alive only when it is being fey and funny in the style of a Noel Coward, perhaps, instead of a Marlowe. ("What, after all, / Is a halo? It's only one more thing to keep clean.") Other shortcomings of the piece are allied to the familiar ones of undergraduate operetta: the plot is over-busy; the meaning is murky; and most of the situations, instead of getting themselves resolved, merely collapse under their own weight. On one occasion, for example, the heroine seems about to choose between being burned as a witch and giving herself to a young lecher who promises to set her free. She considers for some time; quite interests us in her problem; whereupon the hero simply reappears from somewhere, threatens the lecher, and changes the subject. The hero, again, is assigned various motives for his principal obsession: disgusted with things, he wants a conspicuous death; and he hopes, besides, to divert attention from the alleged witch. But these reasons, if they do not logically cancel each

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other out, still leave one doubting whether it is not sheer impudence for him to demand a hanging at public expense when he could so easily hang himself. Like those of an operetta, too, are the various sentiments expressed by the characters and evidently recommended by the play as a whole: the constant ribbing of "orthodoxy" in the person of a hidebound mayor who keeps saying "This will all be gone into at the proper time"; the usual exception made for the genial priest who winks and gets tipsy and addresses his viol as his "wife"; the assertion of the charms of youth and love and freedom ("I shall run / Away from laws if laws can't live in the heart."). I like the character of Margaret, the witty and disenchanted mother of two roguish boys; hers is a stock part in comedies of this order; but it is, as so often, written with genuine spontaneity, as if the author himself aspired to the condition of matriarchy. I also enjoyed Mr. Skipps, the rag-and-bone man, whose appearance toward the end has the same effect on a lagging play as the belated arrival, at a party that has lasted too long, of some hilarious guest—how *really* hilarious we do not, in our great need, inquire. For the rest *The Lady's Not for Burning* left me perversely sympathetic with the hard-pressed mayor, almost ready in retrospect to prefer Polonius to Hamlet, and wanting very much to be as sober and literal, old and loveless, hidebound and orthodox, as possible.

And plainspoken, too, for although I will be told that nothing in the play matters but Fry's verse, that verse is to me the very definition of the word *pastiche*, the providentially perfect example of modernism debouching into Fifth Avenue. Eliot in *The Cocktail Party* is the old modernist himself, concerned to diminish the intensity of his style and simplify the content of his mind for the occasion. Fry, on the other hand, is Fifth Avenue (or Regent Street) cheerfully engaged in availing itself of the spoils. Sometimes in his happy state of total recall vis-à-vis Auden and others he is as charming as a Bergdorf Goodman window trimmed in the colors of Matisse. But there is something in this writer, or more likely in the exigencies of the dramatic medium as compared with the simpler art of window-dressing, which makes him reach for the racy and pursue the quaint like mad. There are highly effective moments:

I am interested
In my feelings. I seem to wish to have some importance
In the play of time. If not,
Then sad was my mother's pain, sad my breath,
Sad the articulation of my bones. . . .

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Yet even this quiet passage, beginning to fancy itself, takes to capering before the mirror:

> *Sad, sad my alacritous web of nerves,*
> *Woefully, woefully sad my wondering brain,*
> *To be shaped and sharpened into such tendrils*
> *Of anticipation, to feed the swamp of space.*

I must add that the production, of which I expected much, turned out to be, in my experience of it, rather uneven too. Pamela Brown was beautiful in herself and in the delivery of her aria-like lines, where the best of the verse is concentrated. But Gielgud, greatly as he is said to relish his part as the misanthrope, seemed to me cavernously unmerry. To him, after all, are given all the more manic metaphors and relentless puns and curses: "Don't they know / I sing solo bass in Hell's Madrigal Club?"

When duly restrained, and writing prose, Fry appears to be an admirable stylist. In *Ring Round the Moon* he has made a lively adaptation of Jean Anouilh's *L'Invitation au château,* to which he gives the subtitle of "A Charade with Music." "Revue" would have done as well, for it is to that kind of show that Anouilh's engaging and quite unenigmatic piece approximates. It is a succession of scenes, most of which present some unmistakable—and delightful—stunt: a duet between two fantastic old women, former school friends who have known better days; an elaborate tango which is also an intimate conversation piece; a kind of ballet *à deux* where money is thrown around instead of the usual balloons or petals. And while Fry in his own piece ventures to conjure up the Elizabethans, Anouilh is content with the more practical tradition of Cocteau. Even Cocteau, however, is grave beside the Anouilh of this particular play, which is based on the Cinderella theme. Doubtless some comment on the problem of identity is embodied in the young twins, one tough, one tender, who make up its composite fairy prince—both played with much grace and ingenuity by a single actor, Denholm Elliot. But although it is the tender one who gets the tangible prize—the Cinderella herself—his brilliant brother is the one we rather overwhelmingly prefer. Nor has Anouilh hesitated to extract from his material a tribute to the Realities: there is some embarrassed moralizing on the subject of unearned riches. But the actual pull of the play is in the opposite direction. The most persuasive character is the twins' dowager aunt—another mocking matriarch—whose charm is obviously guaranteed by her wealth and position. "No one's altogether handsome who isn't altogether human," she says; yet the reverse as clearly holds true

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for the lady herself, in the vivid performance of Lucile Watson, and for her sleek and showy world. With a minimum of ominousness the play celebrates the France of 1912: the pomp, the fashions (hobble-skirts instead of "sheaths"), even the class distinctions which we are to suppose made life adventurous. And the play's Broadway production is perfect, entailing several first-rate performers, a modish but admirably consistent taste, and—presumably—a large capital outlay. The curtains by Dufy are conspicuous waste; but Poulenc's occasional music is indispensable. And the Raymond Sovey set, representing a winter-garden attached to a French chateau, is magnificent of its kind and reveals a mysterious capacity to become more so as the play progresses. Cheerfully elegant in the morning light of the first scene, it gets increasingly splendid as evening comes on, and the ball guests begin to arrive in their diabolically stylish gowns, and the cakes and ices are laid out; and then in the final dawn, to the crackle of belated fireworks, it grows expectantly dewy and incandescent. This set is the appropriate image of a play in which, although the moon's ring may be only a compunctious afterthought, the moon itself is unquestionably there.

John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse,* first acted in London in 1696, and currently revived by the Theatre Guild in conjunction with the Brattle Street Company, is another worldly comedy. But very different is the world it presents: entirely secure in its style, humor and brutality; quite free of remorseful sentiment and compensatory moralizing. *The Relapse,* as it happens, was written to defy a rising Puritanism which was soon greatly to modify Vanbrugh's conditions; yet the play itself succeeds in making those conditions appear immutable. That was clearly its intention and accounts largely for its triumph. Compared to the best work of Congreve, *The Relapse* is not a great play. The code of the Restoration beau, which Congreve transforms into a kind of poetic sensibility, is for Vanbrugh only common sense, when it is not simply a weapon against the Puritans. Yet the latter's play, impregnable in its self-assurance, unremitting in its assault upon the prude, the upstart and the bumpkin, is still effective. And acted with artful vehemence by Cyril Ritchard and an excellent company, it makes the best revival of an old play that I have seen since Gielgud's *Love for Love.* Especially remarkable are the scenes, full of detail and movement, in Sir Tunbelly's forlorn Gothic castle, which looks, as Fashion says, "like Noah's ark, as if the chief part on't were designed for the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field."

In our own dealings with Puritanism in America we have never

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achieved the embattled consistency of a Vanbrugh. Certainly Clifford Odets, with his reformer's message, his sad and seedy poetry, has been nowhere near it. But he had in the thirties much besides: an imagination for people inhabiting a special milieu with a language and logic of its own. That imagination is still his, even though in his new play, *The Country Girl,* it is hindered by a design too conventional to give it full expression. The best part of *The Country Girl* is its calling up of a special atmosphere, in this case the backstage world of the present-day theater. This Odets portrays with carefully sustained dismay and a vivid accumulation of minutiae. And Uta Hagen, as the wife of an alcoholic actor, is the pure embodiment of it. But the interest comes to be focused exclusively on the actor's single fate, the alcoholic problem is made an end in itself, and the larger effect is spoiled. Apparently, in his forced retreat from the Communist ineluctable, Odets has simply sought its equivalent in the clinic. And *The Country Girl* actually improves on the rigor of that institution. The hero—played with dogmatic realism by a Paul Kelly who all too grimly looks the part—is denied any of the flair and eloquence which are notoriously in the alcoholic's equipment. And although he is shown as finally mastering his impulse and returning triumphantly to the stage, it is impossible to believe that he is any kind of an actor; even assuming that, given Odets' dark picture of the theater, we care about anyone's success or failure in it. Drunk or sober the man is a bore, like so many dehumanized alcoholic heroes. Fill him full of whisky and he is good for nothing; drain him of whisky and fill him up with "confidence" and he is ready for anything.

F. W. Dupee

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BOOKS

FAULKNER AND CONTEMPORARIES

COLLECTED STORIES. By William Faulkner. Random House. $4.75.
THE DAY OF THE LOCUST. By Nathanael West. New Directions. $1.50.
THE DISENCHANTED. By Budd Schulberg. Random House. $3.50.
THE TWENTY-FIFTH HOUR. By C. Virgil Gheorghiu. Knopf. $3.50.
MAKE LIGHT OF IT. By William Carlos Williams. Random House. $3.50.

Faulkner's *Collected Stories* form a continuous commentary on the whole of his work. They do not make as clear a design as the excerpts in the Viking *Portable Faulkner,* but because there are more constants—locale, family, historical themes, character—in Faulkner's writing than in that of any other American novelist, a collection of his stories assembled on any principle is bound to give a fairly exact impression of the range and quality of his work. You have here the old Indian South, the South of the Civil War and earlier, the present-day South, and a few excursions Faulkner has made to other American regions and to Europe. The range of character is just as large, from the Indian chiefs, through his main Southern families, to the pilots and stunt fliers and students on a walking tour. Some of the stories bear a direct relation to the novels, in which they appear as episodes. Others are connected with the body of his work only through similarities of style. But whatever the degree of connection, this is, in all but one respect, the essential Faulkner whose work grows out of, turns round and always comes back to the basic themes of blood, land, and the fusion of the two in human character. The only aspect of his writing of which this collection does not give an adequate impression is the legend of the South that he has constructed, over and beyond the Southern reality—and it is to this legend that I should like to devote the space I have in this review to deal with Faulkner.

The paradox of William Faulkner is that the element of greatness in his work is inseparable from his Southern qualities, but he does not write well in his main concern with the South, its history and legend. The virtues and defects of his writing are co-ordinate with two styles, which are almost always mixed. One is simple and full of references to nature; there is nothing to equal it in American writing today. It is in

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this style that he creates the plodding, patient, modest, indestructible vitality of his Dilseys and Lena Groves, his perfect images. They owe their perfection to his love of them, and of the principle of life which they embody: their goodness is their profound submissiveness. Whatever you may think of this as a principle (I myself don't like it), it is necessary to concede the depth to which Faulkner carries it in his characterizations. (At times it virtually takes him out of American literature and into the nineteenth-century literary and political legend of the Russian peasant.) So also with his villains, the Popeyes and Jasons and Joe Christmases, whose villainy is a denial of this principle. The worst thing he can find to say about them is *depthless*. They are the stiff-necked, the cheap, the mechanical, the cheats of life, which they think they can escape by refusing the rituals of yielding which the good folk perform daily. In this love and in this hatred, there is no one more open than Faulkner. He is unashamedly touching and simple, and he would certainly be a homiletic writer, were it not for the fact that he is pointing up no trite morality. There is no morality at all in his sense of character; he constructs a good and evil without it, by-passing morality in his immediate feeling for life.

In illustration of this style, I present one of its best moments, a passage from *The Wild Palms* in the counterpointed narrative, "Old Man," which describes the Mississippi in flood:

> It was as if the water itself were in three strata, separate and distinct, the bland and unhurried surface . . . screening as though by vicious calculation the rush and fury of the flood itself, and beneath this in turn the original stream, trickle, murmuring along in the opposite direction, following undisturbed and unaware its appointed course. . . .

This is not only a description of flood; it is so excellent an analysis of nature that it contains also a schematism of human character structure, one which he has followed in all his work. Most likely Faulkner is unaware that this scheme corresponds exactly to that of Freud and Reich; as he may also be unaware of the original Lao-Tse who saw in water the symbol of the Tao. In Faulkner, also, but purely as instinct, the Tao and the Teh—the way of nature and of human character—are one. This is the element of greatness in his work.

In his other style, which dominates his writing, Faulkner constructs his legend of the South. It is here that all his famous traits are found: the rhetoric, the difficult, involved sentences, gratuitous and exaggerated, the tangle of meanings and motives. So little is left of the touching simplicity and openness, it is hard to believe that the same man writes in both styles. But neither is long present without the other, and even

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in his most thickly overgrown passages there is always, eventually, a clear space where the artist has been at work, with a skill perhaps more of woodcraft than of words, hacking, draining, clearing the ground. But again the forest closes in, and there are times when even Faulkner is a baffled guide.

This is not good writing; it is unfortunate that it takes up such a large and necessary part of his work. It seems to me necessary as a kind of concealment—this is the only probable motive for such bad writing in so good a writer. (Occasionally—as in *Absalom, Absalom!*—Faulkner's obscurity offers so exact a structural paraphrase of the human relationships in the narrative, it is no longer a defect but a literary necessity.) Faulkner writes poorly of the South (not of the people, the objects, the activities, the countryside, but of his own legend), his sentences like the paths of a maze, to wind and cross and stop dead—because he has to. Clarity about the legend of the South, as in *Intruder in the Dust,* is more than he can afford.

Strictly speaking, there is no legend of the South, not even in Faulkner, because the South is too much a part of the United States. It is just not different enough. The attempt to create a special legend always leads to an overexploitation of the differences in history, race and culture between South and outland (Faulkner's term). Left to itself, this exploitation would die of a lack of resources. Sooner or later it must appear even to the most stubborn Southerner that these differences are not so great as he supposes, and nowhere nearly so significant; and if this is too optimistic an assumption, there is a limit, by way of natural death, which even these falsehoods must face. Say what you will about the deficiency of the liberal imagination, you cannot go on forever making an issue of homogeneous cultures and alleged differences between Negro and white, when none of these issues is real. Consequently, *legend*: a mode of belief that is supposed to exempt the believer from true and false.

But this is only the outer defense, thrown up merely at logic. There is no case for the legend even in imagination. It serves Faulkner only the purpose of defying the outland, and, within the South, the depthless Snopeses who have taken over and spoiled the old tradition; he seldom celebrates the tradition directly. The death of the old tradition is all that matters—one could not be a "Southerner" without it. The tradition is a convenient invention; it need never have been alive. And as a matter of fact, Faulkner believes only in its death: a Crucifiction without Nativity or Resurrection. The South becomes a state of mind with him, proud, anarchic, willfully archaic, a condition of virtue by default of

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the world. But he does not carry off this theme. For one thing, lacking almost entirely an intellectual culture, he has no way of enriching his theme, of making it sound necessary or convincing—and the reactionary impulse is lost without culture. Besides, his own gifts are more suited to destroy the legend than to perpetuate it. His vision is too violent to sustain the genteel dreams of an agrarian aristocracy. He does not hesitate to call the land accursed; the blood stain of slavery is still deep on it. This limits the Romantic possibilities of the Southern past. Its present, even for Faulkner, is immediately in the world. He admits all the weaknesses of the South, its susceptibility to coke and chrome, nor does he pretend that the legend has in any way made it proof against the cheapness of modern life. This honesty, though admirable, is fatal to the legend. It is, like Quentin Compson's outcry, "I don't hate it! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!" an admission from which it is impossible to recover.

In the stories of this collection, the legend is only scantily developed, and while the simpler style has a better opportunity to speak for itself, something is lost without the desperate struggle between his two themes and his gigantic effort of will does not appear. But in a few of the stories he attains so high an art, one can hardly imagine the level his art might have reached, had it not been forced to wear itself down in the hopeless inner struggle of most of the novels. By far the greatest story in the collection—it is also one of the greatest in our language—is "Red Leaves," which deals with the death of the Chickasaw chief Issetibbeha. Faulkner's deepest feeling for life is here engaged, and never dissipated, and following one another, with a compression unique for him, appear all the themes of doom and submission, which usually have a questionable ring within the context of his "South." But there is no false legend here. In the prehistory of his Indian narratives, his episodes have an extraordinary self-sufficiency, and his subjects an undiminished power, born without the trauma of the Civil War. His imagination, for once, is set free, it works out its own drama, without the need to plead or prove a superimposed case, and cover with impenetrable rhetoric the traces of a false argument. It is not too much to say that this story, like all his best writing, succeeds precisely because it is something Faulkner has written not about the South, but *over* it, over its dead body, in a moment of complete triumph. In these brief victories over the South he wins his greatness.

Most of the books and articles that have come out of the intellectuals' recent interest in popular culture have been so bad that one

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might well think of them as the intellectuals' own form of popular culture. These lucubrations have been self-conscious or condescending or inspired by a mawkish concern over the fate of culture. In nearly every case, the writer has been disinclined or unable to participate in the life he was talking about. Hollywood, radio, television, detective stories, the comic strips, etc., are no place for the alienated; you either like this sort of thing or you leave it alone. The only man who, in my opinion, really knew what he was doing was Nathanael West, and this is because of his theme—it runs through both *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust,* and it makes him unique among American novelists—the secret inner life of the masses.

West's credentials for writing *The Day of the Locust* were painfully earned. He came to Hollywood to write for the movies, when the three novels he had already published, including *Miss Lonelyhearts,* failed to sell. But there isn't a streak of self-pity in *The Day of the Locust,* though it is derived from an experience of Hollywood that must have been up to his ears. He went beyond the personal irritation; in fact, Hollywood didn't seem to have irritated him at all. There is so much gusto in his satire, so much taste for the very thing he was destroying, that he achieved in this book a kind of serenity, as a man will when his love and his hate work together.

Though West did not want to be considered a surrealist, it is a fairly accurate classification; there is the same compression of meaning in his images, often several layers thick, and the compression achieves for him a similar effect, incandescent and explosive. Now this is by no means an estrangement from the popular, the surrealists themselves having made extensive use of devices from popular culture. In West's use of this imagery he straddles the two worlds of his own sensibility, the poetic and the popular, and the grotesques who fill his work, the dwarf bookie, the girl with a hole in her face instead of a nose ("no boy will take me out . . . although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and . . . pretty clothes"), the family of performing Eskimos, etc., are derived from this juxtaposition. This not only gave West access to an existence usually closed to intellectuals; it worked both ways, showing him the limitations of the intellectuals' ordinary position. His conscious characters are by the measure of their own elevation above the mass cut off from the necessary contact with common life. The result is neither an apology for nor a condemnation of the popular. It has independent status, the nearest thing to a new art form ever to be derived from the materials of a mass culture. It is a pity that he had not fully brought it off at the time of his early death, for with West

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went one of our few real chances to salvage something from commercialization; and we are not likely to have another writer so gifted and so well situated.

But this puts it all too placidly. West's art was closer to nightmare. He saw, as everybody has seen, the starvation latent in the popular media, but he stayed clear of the platitudes and condolences over the death of culture. He showed the death of everything with the walls tumbling down. The starvation is not only for good books and fine music; it is a starvation for all of life, for sexual fulfillment, for decent work, for pleasure and happiness and relief from the desolation that drives people insane. (West had a religious sense of this need, which must have worked in him as it does in the mass, making him peculiarly sensitive to the symbols of holy violence. *The Day of the Locust* is foaming with prophecy.) Out of this starvation swarm the locusts, the mobs gone mad and descending on the cities to revenge themselves on the make-believe of effortless satisfaction that inflamed their hunger. Nathanael West was in touch with the popular culture over its whole range, and he has so far remained the only one who has drawn the whole conclusion.

Because the writing of the first few chapters is so poor, it is tempting to put down *The Disenchanted* by Budd Schulberg as the usual Hollywood story. But this is really not the case, for the writing improves somewhat toward the middle of the book, and the motive of the novel, it soon becomes clear, is an excellent one. I have come to feel about novels such as this very much as I do about the movies themselves. An honest B production is the safest bet, and I will take it any day in preference to the artistic jobs with a purpose that are supposed to appeal to my advanced taste. *The Disenchanted* is a straight B job, and a rather unpretentious one, considering the opportunities for exploitation in its theme—a dramatization of F. Scott Fitzgerald's declining days. Schulberg does not have the necessary sensibility to get into the character of so highly sensitive a writer as Fitzgerald; but he does as well as he can, and his love and loyalty to him are most of the time touching in their sincerity. The several moments of failure are caused by his extreme veneration for the figure of the novelist. Like his producer, Victor Milgrim (a character which he handles very well) he is often unable to do more with Halliday than to put him on display. He exhibits his ruin, piling on the humiliations (his only dramatic way of showing how much better Fitzgerald deserved) until the whole effect is lost. But he makes up for this in the passages which compare the twenties with the present, and seriously try to catch and analyze the qualities of Fitzgerald's style.

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C. Virgil Gheorghiu's grade A stinker, *The Twenty-fifth Hour,* when it is not simply inane, is the most vicious thing in its underhanded allegiance to totalitarianism since Curzio Malaparte's *Kaputt.* The following is a fair example of the writing:

"You can't stay here," went on the old man [to Susanna, the girl friend of his son, Jon, who has brought her to his home]. "If you do, Aristitza will strangle you or split your head open. . . . Then, if Jon found out he'd kill his mother, and that would be a great sin."

This Jon is a stupid Rumanian peasant who is sent to a concentration camp when the local police sergeant, desiring Susanna, makes out a false report that Jon is a Jew. He goes through all the concentration camps of Europe, nowhere running across one Jew who is anything but a louse. As for the Nazis, they are, like all other Europeans, brutalized by modern technology, but they don't try to take advantage of you.

Machinery is the real villain of our time. The mechanical slaves, the buttons and gadgets that do our work for us, have revolted and imposed their own conditions of life on the masters, with the result that the individual man counts for nothing. This is the theme of the novel, to the extent that it has one. But I have never seen a more mechanical treatment of a theme. The two erudite characters, Father Koruga, the Orthodox priest, and his son Traian, the novelist (evidently Gheorghiu himself; he, too, is writing a novel called the *Twenty-fifth Hour,* and it seems to be every bit as bad as this one) go about, in and out of concentration camps and cattle cars, quoting page after page of Eliot, Auden, Lewis Mumford, Count Keyserling, F. S. C. Northrop, and W. Burnett Easton, Jr., by permission of the copyright owners, and St. Thomas, and several other authorities in the public domain. This documentation is supposed to show that the state of the world is precisely what Traian-Gheorghiu says it is. It is a much more convincing demonstration that he has no ideas of his own. He does not need any, for he picks things up very fast. Anti-Semitism, for instance.

It is a relief to turn from this noxious gasbag to a man like William Carlos Williams. You get from him in *Make Light of It* (a collection of stories written over a period of some forty years) the feeling, primarily, of a man. There is no pretentiousness, not a single syllable has been faked. It is not even the poet or the physician who comes through (though most of the stories are written from the G.P.'s point of view). There is nothing but a plain humanity, of which a man must have a tremendous store to be able to present it so bare. It is this quality

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a family romance

ELIZABETH POLLET

It's a long shot, of course . . . but maybe our editorial enthusiasm justifies hyperbole . . . anyway, here at New Directions we have a wild hunch that Elizabeth Pollet, whose first novel we have just published, just might develop into the Jane Austen of her day. A preposterous idea? Perhaps. Yet in this story of an American family—in which we see how the ties that bind may also become the tensions that divide—there is more than a hint of the deep perception and grace of phrase that mark the writer of real genius.

TIME: "One of the minor literary phenomena of the '40's was the rise of the utterly self-assured, or cold-poached-eye school of female novelists. Such gifted writers as Mary McCarthy and Jean Stafford command a cosmopolitan confidence that makes a lot of their male counterparts read like sentimental softies raised on Louisa May Alcott. Since the new school is now threatened with overcrowding, it is a relief to find New York-born Elizabeth Pollet enrolling elsewhere with her first novel. **A Family Romance** has its faults, but they are not those of the self-assurance school; at its best, **A Family Romance** achieves a rare, fresh tone of youthful warmth and wonder . . . Elizabeth Pollet explores the world . . . as if it had never been seen before. . . ."

Paul Engle in **THE CHICAGO SUNDAY TRIBUNE:** "The prose of this first novel is so finely clear and transparent that, like quiet water, it is often hard to realize what depth it contains. It is, indeed, almost an anti-prose, as if the author had deliberately kept her verbal manner down to the plain word and the direct phrase, at the opposite extreme from so much complicated modern prose. . . . The story moves so casually it would be wrong to summarize it. Nor could one catch the original insights into personality, nor the decisive shifts of mind which are the book's level of reality."

PHILIP RAHV: "The remarkable quality of Elizabeth Pollet's novel is its absolute emotional honesty. One seldom comes upon a work of fiction in which truth is made to serve the ends of art with such intensity and unity of effect."

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE: "Written with commendable simplicity and honesty, the novel has perceptive flashes that illuminate both the painful uncertainties of youth and the ambivalence of family ties." **$2.50**

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which he ranks first, and which he wants, above all, to be identified with. Sometimes it gets away from him and becomes an object in itself. Then the stories, some of which are slight, seem little more than a pretext to win admiration for this image of the author. But when the self-love is absorbed in a love of life and the image of the man is left to establish itself, you find something which is rare at all times and practically extinct in our own: a simple but enormous vitality that discharges itself in celebration of the good things—love, sex, the healthy animality of women and their well-shaped bodies; a turn of phrase or event brings into momentary focus some happy occasion, charged with life. Or the sad things—unwanted children, children dying of sickness or neglect, ruined marriages, the suffering of the poor. In his best stories, "The Colored Girls of Passenack," "An Old Fashioned Raid," "A Descendant of Kings," "Old Doc Rivers," "The Girl with a Pimply Face," "Jean Beicke," "To Fall Asleep," he makes his point with a charm, ease, force and bite which, for all their directness, are even a little old-fashioned: the assumptions of this humanity have not yet been worn away by modern experience, as they have for almost all other writers. It is precisely this which makes Williams avant-garde.

Isaac Rosenfeld

GYROSCOPE AND RADAR

THE LONELY CROWD. By David Riesman. Yale University Press. $4.00.

Mr. Riesman's subject is the changing character of the American people (more particularly, of the urban middle class who may be regarded as its most typical members), and his main argument is that they are becoming more gregarious. Formerly the middle-class American was "inner-directed"; he was guided by inner values, initially implanted by parental discipline, of which the most important were those of Puritan morality and of economic success. Today he is more likely to be "other-directed," being primarily concerned with keeping the approval of the group to which he belongs and hence with avoiding any overt expression of attitudes (such as moral severity and personal ambition) that might provoke antagonism. The inner-directed person, Mr. Riesman suggests, was guided by a kind of psychic gyroscope set going by his parents, so that getting off course would provoke a feeling of guilt. The modern other-directed person, on the other hand, has a diffuse anxiety which makes him responsive to a wider range of signals,

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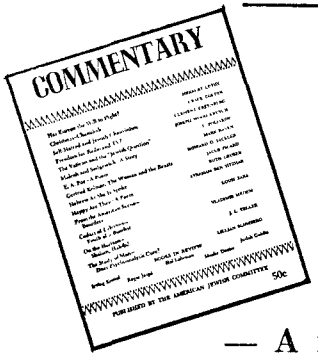

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so that his control equipment resembles a radar. This thesis is documented with a mass of observations derived mainly from current trends in child education, business and social mores, and politics. The vocabulary is rather overweighted with sociological jargon; but unlike most books of its kind, this one is a pleasure to read. It is the product of a sophisticated intelligence, with an unusually wide range of interests and a talent for effective phrase-making. Mr. Riesman has a poker-face way of using technical words to produce sardonic effects which reminds one of Thorstein Veblen.

Once one has absorbed Mr. Riesman's thesis, one begins to find corroborations of it in every direction. It provides connecting links for a great variety of apparently disparate data. Why is it, for example, that most American achievements (the invention of the atomic bomb is a good illustration) are due primarily to a highly developed capacity for smooth teamwork rather than to individual pre-eminence? Why do American psychiatrists show a tendency to regard group adjustment as the main standard of "normality"? Why did Roosevelt at Yalta think it more important to get the Russians to like the Americans than to insist on a good settlement? Why is jealousy ceasing to be an overt factor in American sex mores? Why is it that the magic word on all levels of modern politics is "security"? Why has the need for group approval, either for oneself or (more insidiously) for one's children, become the most effective weapon of the modern advertiser? One could continue citing examples indefinitely. As Mr. Riesman expresses it,

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233)

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middle-class Americans used to be rather like the competitive Kwakiutls, and are still inclined to think of themselves in such terms. In reality, they are beginning to resemble the nonaggressive Pueblos, among whom "no one wishes to be thought a great man, and everyone wishes to be thought a good fellow."

Why has this change come about? To this question Mr. Riesman (as he himself recognizes) has no very convincing answer. Obviously it is connected with current economic trends, with the decline of competition and the growth of bureaucracy (the most significant manifestations of which are not in government but in the big corporations). On the other hand, the desire to be a good fellow rather than a great man appears to have been already becoming an American trait more than a century ago (to judge from Tocqueville and other observers). For somewhat obscure reasons Mr. Riesman chooses to regard the birth rate as the primary factor in social development. He divides the evolution of a society into three phases. In the initial phase birth and death rates are both high, and men are guided by tradition. In the second phase the death rate drops, the society undergoes a rapid expansion, and the typical person is inner-directed. Finally, population becomes stable, emphasis shifts from production to consumption, and men become other-directed. It is difficult to see, however, why the birth rate should be regarded as cause rather than consequence; if men and women have fewer children, it is presumably because of a prior change in their code of values. And while a mature economy no longer needs the dynamic drive of a Puritan conscience, Mr. Riesman does not explain very convincingly why this should cause a change to other-directedness.

Mr. Riesman makes a considerable effort to maintain scientific objectivity, and occasionally apologizes because his vocabulary may appear to show a bias in favor of inner-direction. These apologies seem to me to be unnecessary. The gregariousness of Western urban society (as Reisman points out, similar changes are occurring in Europe) seems to be due not to any positive belief in co-operation but simply to a sense of bewilderment. If individuals feel a need for the approval of other people (who are themselves also seeking approval, so that the whole process becomes a collective hunt for something that does not exist), it is because they no longer have any particular value convictions of their own. They are like people playing a game in which they are uncertain of the rules (in contrast to the inner-directed person who knows the rules and is prepared, if necessary, to insist on obedience to them). This is, no doubt, due chiefly to the rapid economic and

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social changes of recent decades, although it is also connected with the dissolution of the religious beliefs upon which the traditional values depended. In a relatively stable period, like the nineteenth century, the individual could proceed successfully through life under the guidance of the psychic gyroscope acquired in infancy. In our own age this is no longer possible; survival depends upon responsiveness to a wider range of signals. I suppose that few modern parents feel that they can pass on moral guidance to their children with much sense of conviction about its permanent validity.

Obviously the most important question is whether contemporary man can regain a more positive sense of value without reverting to the authoritarianism and the irrational religiosity from which our ancestors emerged in earlier centuries. Otherwise, he is not likely to survive in competition with those groups in our society who have remained at an earlier stage of cultural evolution; birth-rate trends, for example, suggest that the population of the United States a century hence will consist mostly of Catholics and fundamentalists. To this question Mr. Riesman gives what may be regarded as the traditional liberal answer, although his specific formulation is derived from Erich Fromm. The free individual should need neither gyroscope nor radar; he can transcend both guilt and anxiety and become "autonomous" (in Fromm's terminology, "spontaneous," or "productive"). In a concluding section Mr. Reisman discusses what social changes are desirable in order to encourage the growth of autonomy.

As a social program this does not seem very adequate, and Mr. Riesman does not succeed in conveying much sense of conviction about it. Fromm's main example of a "productive" person is the creative artist. Obviously anything that encourages the individual with creative potentialities to resist the pressure of the mass mind is good. But such individuals are never likely to be more than a tiny minority, and a society in which they became numerous would probably (like ancient Athens and Renaissance Italy) lose the cohesion necessary for survival. Creative individuals are usually egotistical and unresponsive to social discipline. Fromm's "productive" man (like the natural man of Rousseau and eighteenth-century liberalism) is based on the hypothesis of an underlying harmony between private wishes and group interest; in proportion as men become spontaneous, he supposes, they will be motivated by love for other people. Such a hypothesis seems highly utopian when contrasted with the Freudian view of a necessary and tragic tension between the emotional drives of the individual and the requirements of social discipline (so that some degree of neurosis is an inev-

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itable concomitant of civilization). This means that society needs a system of positive values, which can be incorporated in the private conscience. Any code of values appropriate to our society would no doubt be less individualistic and less puritanical than that of our grandfathers; inner direction need not involve the rigors of a Calvinist conscience. But the crystallization of such a code probably requires more social stability than can at present be expected; psychic gyroscopes will not function unless men can feel a reasonable assurance that the rules are not going to be changed.

Henry Bamford Parkes

ANALYSIS AT DEAD CENTER

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RELIGION. By Erich Fromm. Yale University Press. $2.50.

To the nonprofessional reader Erich Fromm would appear to be the most intelligent of that group of post-Freudian analysts nowadays described as "culturally oriented." One finds in his writing very little of the thoughtless and glib "emancipation" which leads such an analyst as Clara Thompson to assert, in the light of the dear old Kwakiutls and Zunis, the abysses of Freud's cultural unawareness. In her recent *Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development,* Dr. Thompson says that what Freud believed to be "innate biological human nature was to a great extent a reaction to European culture." Furthermore, it is now apparent "that the two basic drives, sex and aggression, postulated by Freud are not in themselves problems." It is a fact that Freud was very much a man of his time and place and that he paid insufficient attention to the ways in which biological drives may be modified by cultural influences. Other facts are that such peoples as the Zunis found ways of getting rid of their aggressions less destructively than we do and that the Cascagians (the people who write from the bottom of the page to the top, discovered by Swift) show little interest in sex. Still the whole enormous body of evidence assembled by modern anthropology does not force one to believe that Freud was wrong when he said that a major part of the human constitution is biological.

The new image of Freud invented in some of the purlieus of the revisionist movement is very interesting. Dr. Thompson writes that Freud was a Victorian prude who could not help feeling that sex was connected with man's baser instincts. He was dangerously authoritarian and patriarchal, like the men of the Dark Ages (an era roughly co-extensive with

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the Victorian Age). He despised women and was pessimistic. His cultural orientation was confined to middle-class Europeans (a complaint made by some psychoanalytic writers with as strong a sense of outrage as if they and their readers and patients were Dobuans and not middle-class Europeans and Americans). He believed that certain facts about human nature were fixed and unalterable. The severity of Freud's naturalism, his sternness of mind, is now generally regarded as unworthy. Like so much of the modern polemic dubiously associated with the liberal position, the polemic of the culturally oriented analysts has been less concerned with rationally disproving the validity of the enemy's assertions than with proclaiming him to be reactionary and otherwise disreputable.

The superiority of Freud consists in his having remained a psychoanalyst. Whatever his failures—the biases of his mind, his tendency to waver between a scientifically defensible method and his peculiarly narrow metaphysics—he always regarded theoretical psychoanalysis as a discipline for studying man's psychic constitution and not as a form of ethics or liberalism or humanism or religion.

The point, of course, is not that a concern with liberalism or ethical problems is wrong, either in the analyst or anyone else. One feels no strong animus against Dr. Fromm's particular kind of post-Goethean humanism, even when one deplores its vague universalism. The real objection, the real sinking feeling in the heart, comes when in Fromm's books one finds the intelligible and delimited concepts of Freud shifting before one's eyes, not into clearer, more comprehensive, more demonstrable concepts, but into shapeless, generalized ethical quantities. Freud's idea of the ego is not free of metaphysics, but it is at least clear and discussable. In Fromm's writing the ego, occupying a dimly defined place in the "self" and the "soul," is described in metaphors like this (the metaphor may be instructive even though Fromm is not writing "technically"): "we experience this unique and individualized ego as only one of the infinite versions of life, just as a drop from the ocean is different from and yet the same as all other drops which are also particularized modes of the same ocean." Incest, we are told, is not primarily sexual in origin. It is "interpersonal." The most illuminating episode in the Oedipus myth occurs when the son meets his father at the crossroad and kills him—because the father is an obstacle in the son's progress from dependence to freedom. If such an idea is indeed useful and suggestive, it has nevertheless neither the clarity nor the complexity of Freud's use of the Oedipus myth. How are we to keep our grasp on such terms as "incestuous" when we read in *Psychoanalysis and Religion* of the general tendency of man to "fall back into the incestuous worship

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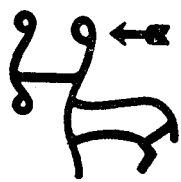
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of the soil, of idols, and of the state"?—the word is synonymous with too many morally weighted terms, such as childish, reactionary, superstitious, and totalitarian.

I have put off mentioning Fromm's views on religion for so many paragraphs partly because his book does not really deal with religion, but only with the ethical humanism he finds at the core of all great "religious" beliefs: Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, Socratism, Spinozism, the "religion" of Reason of the French Revolution. The point of his book is to show that religion and psychoanalysis are neither identical nor opposed to each other. His mode of proof is to translate both religion and psychoanalysis into ethics, a process whereby they become if not identical in every respect, then identical in most of their aims. On this point, Monsignor Sheen strikes me as more perspicuous than Fromm; for there really is and ought to be a fundamental clash between religion and psychoanalysis.

The reader will perceive how many distinctions are lost in such a method as Fromm's. His loose terminology allows him to prove that Freud himself was religious. In short, Fromm does not allow the possibility of being nonreligious. He believes that the only choice open to mankind is between "humanistic religion" and "authoritarian" or idolatrous religions such as are seen in Calvinism and modern totalitarianism.

It occurs to Dr. Fromm himself that he is unconscionably obscuring the difference between religion and humanist ethics, and at one place in his book he seeks to discriminate the qualities of experience which are peculiarly those of religion. They are wonder and a sense of the marvelous; a sense of "ultimate concern"; an attitude of oneness with oneself and with all of universal life. And these, he says, are experiences which analysis opens up to the unhappy and the neurotic. Perhaps it does. But are these experiences necessarily religious? Fromm, at least, does not show them to be such. Even in quoting Tillich on "ultimate concern" he has translated a theological idea into a humanist sentiment. According to usual definitions of the word (*i.e.*, any definition which allows the possibility of *not* being religious), Dr. Fromm is himself not religious. Or so one concludes when he declares against all forms of theistic belief which present God as anything but a symbol of man's own powers and when he describes the current "escape from freedom" to the church as a "failure of nerve." If we wonder why, in this case, he tells us that our only choice is between different forms of "religion," I suppose we must recall the tradition of central European humanism from which he descends, with its tendency to see narrow-mindedness and philistinism in every naturalist position, its tendency to stress whatever ethical mild-

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ness and spirituality it can find in the Spinozas and Freuds of the world and to ignore their uncompromising idea of nature and of man's place in nature.

It must be noted that Dr. Fromm, though "culturally oriented," is by no means a cultural relativist. With an assurance Freud never displayed in making such generalizations, he speaks of the fundamental and "immutable laws inherent in human nature and human functioning which operate in any given culture." Summarized very crudely, these are the laws according to which man struggles either neurotically or normally to exist amid his opposing impulses toward dependence and freedom and to develop toward that final freedom which allows one to love fully, to seek truth, to develop fully one's creative potentialities, to realize one's "moral and intellectual integrity." Fromm regards man as a dependent, powerless, thwarted, and amorphous creature who seeks through a complicated dialectic of interpersonal relationships to establish in his personality the moral core of the world's "humanist religions." As is usual in Dr. Fromm's writings, the moral idea is admirable. But if psychoanalysis is still a method of treating neurosis and, beyond that, of investigating the psychic character of man, what has all this to do with psychoanalysis? It would appear to have a good deal more to do

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with that Socratic dialogue which the humanist supposes to be eternally and universally carried on in the heart of human darkness.

The superiority of Fromm to his revisionist colleagues is to be seen in his wide intellectual culture, his genuine sense of the anguish and poverty of the neurotic personality and of its powerful impulse to "escape." It is all the more regrettable that in seeking to revise a body of doctrine which is admittedly too narrow, he has closed down the universe of discourse into that vague and dim centrality to which liberal humanism is prone. The Freudian terminology may be narrow, but what of the universe Freud opened up to our contemplation? It is at least possible to distinguish therein between mind and body, ego and id, God and nature, religion and nonreligion, incest and political reaction, sexuality and nonsexuality. There is no doubt that the anthropologist, the philosopher, the literary critic, and the post-Freudian analyst will continue to find it necessary to revise Freud. But Dr. Fromm's new book is another piece of evidence in support of one's conviction that if psychoanalytic theory is to pass successfully through its present state of general confusion, it will have to do so as a continued extension of the more severely naturalistic parts of Enlightenment philosophy.

Richard Chase

THE VALUE OF TASTE

CLASSICS AND COMMERCIALS. By Edmund Wilson. Farrar, Straus. $5.

Though it can be taken merely as a pleasant collection of reviews, *Classics and Commercials* is most profitably read as a chapter in Edmund Wilson's intellectual history; specifically, as an effort to test once again, this time against the writing of the past decade, a literary commitment first reached in the twenties. Wilson's book makes clear that for him the twenties were the great and exciting years, and on them he has lavished that nostalgia which gravely vibrates through all his recent work. What strikes a younger person as so remarkable is not, as might be supposed, that anyone should feel strongly enough about a moment of recent life to wish to romanticize it, but that when one does look into the literary milieu of the twenties one becomes convinced that, nostalgia aside, there *really* was in it something of the freedom, the generosity and high humor for which its lost children yearn. Wilson's particular commitment was to a search for independence in career and disinterested excellence in taste, and that search led him through some strange, battering journeys, from the interior of Axel's castle to the very gates of the Finland station; but, at whatever cost,

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he took his chances, as every serious writer must. Now, in a literary atmosphere he evidently finds alien, he has returned to test the value of his taste.

I think it the modicum of justice, let alone that gratitude which has become so unfashionable in American literary life, to say at once that Wilson's taste remains one of the most valuable and interesting of our time. Those who shook their heads knowingly when he took the *New Yorker* job are shown to have been rather silly: this is the same writer, with the same strengths and weaknesses, as before—no man can undo in a few reviews what he has made of himself in 25 years. If the pieces in *Classics and Commercials* differ from those in his previous books, it is only in being deliberately slighter in frame and, because of the absence of those guiding notions he once used as binder, more frankly dependent on sheer taste. But the fundamental dispositions behind his work remain unaltered: an emphasis on literature as a pleasure-yielding activity and an instinctive bias toward the view that it is always intertwined with other disciplines and passions; a wide and, if you wish, journalistic curiosity about how men live and get things done; a belief that criticism is a conversation among peers in which exegesis can be little more than a preliminary to the main business of

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comparing and refining tastes; and a quite unique appreciation of the extent to which criticism may be taken as a form of cultivated play. His work suggests no image of blackboard and chalk; nor can it be mistaken for the criticism of three dozen other people, as so many recent essays can be; it is his and his alone, the strength inseparable from the weakness.

Much of that strength derives from the fact that in some general sense Wilson is still a radical. Though his obsession with an ogre he whimsically calls "dialectical materialism" reminds one of John O'Hara's obsession with an ogre *he* calls "Edmund Wilson," the underlying attitude of *Classics and Commercials* is still the traditional radical wariness before official institutions and the bureaucratized minds they produce. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Wilson has retained the classical picture of The Enemy: Hollywood, Broadway, mass journalism, middlebrow professors. When writing about trash he knows that the most important critical job is to insist that it is trash, and he does not acquiesce to that surrender of standards which, in the name of a sociological analysis of mass culture, permits a cheap detective-story writer to be treated with the elaborateness usually reserved for a serious artist. It is the same adherence to standards, the same old-fashioned insistence that at the very least a book must be *written,* which leads Wilson to his superb annihilation of the mystery novel fad, that vast bore cultivated by people who do not find good writing sufficiently "relaxing." If one sometimes feels that he spends too much time in stalking such easy game as Kay Boyle and Louis Bromfield, one must remember that hygiene is an inescapable function of reviewing and, more important, that Wilson is dealing with writers who in his younger days were taken with a certain amount of seriousness.

Of course, there is nothing in *Classics and Commercials* nearly so good as the essays in Wilson's more ambitious collections, and I suppose it is not irrelevant to deplore whatever it was that compelled him to devote his time to snippets rather than major work. Though he writes well about third-rate books precisely because he has behind him a body of serious criticism, Wilson does not quite escape the trap of literary journalism, which is that it forces you to write about books you would not ordinarily care to read. Still, there are pieces in *Classics and Commercials* (those, for example, on Wilde, Peacock, Faulkner, Maugham and Steinbeck) that are very fine miniatures of criticism. The one serious gap, particularly if you bear in mind the book's subtitle, "A Literary Chronicle of the Forties," is the absence of any discussion of new writers, a few of whom would surely have provided a greater chal-

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lenge to Wilson's critical powers than Dorothy Parker or William Saroyan.

Some of the essays in *Classics and Commercials* are marred by an occasional slip from nostalgia into sentimentality, though this is not true of the best single thing in the book, "Thoughts on Being Bibliographed," or of the moving memoir of Paul Rosenfeld. Wilson is, however, excessively tender at times toward old memories and old cronies: to call Alexander Woollcott a "folk-hero" is rather to overdo it a bit and to praise Max Eastman as an intellectual iconoclast without so much as mentioning his recent phase as Marx-baiter for the *Readers' Digest* carries generosity beyond the point friendship might require.

Classics and Commercials contains another kind of essay which raises, for me at least, an interesting problem in taste. I am quite unable to share Wilson's fondness for the English gentleman-aesthete, the *arbiter elegantiarum* in books and vintages. The point is not that I feel any special antipathy toward this sort of writer but that he is essentially beyond the bound of my reach and cannot rouse in me strong

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reactions either friendly or hostile. I mention this not as a contrast in personal idiosyncrasies but because I suspect that my feeling is rather widely shared among readers of the generation brought up during the depression. Our divergence from Wilson's taste is here not merely a literary problem but also a reflection of a difference in the experience of two generations separated from each other by more than years.

But no such explanation could account for Wilson's essay on Kafka. An intelligent depreciation of Kafka would be useful, if only to save him from most of the appreciators, and Wilson does offer some acute critical remarks. But his essay is finally disappointing because he rejects the claims for Kafka's greatness less on aesthetic than on moral grounds; he sees Kafka's novels as a plea for moral passivity—which is to miss, among other things, Kafka's occasional strand of subterranean rebelliousness and his quite unpassive humor. One suspects that this essay is partly a consequence of more than a reading of Kafka, that it reflects Wilson's irritation with the Kafka cult and, more generally, the current literary scene. Often enough the irritation is justified, but it would be released far more usefully in direct polemic than in occasional remarks. If Wilson troubled to organize his opinions of the New Criticism into a rounded essay rather than inserting them into a review of a book by Gilbert Highet, it would be better not only for us but for him.

Finally, a word about Wilson as writer. He has become one of our finest prose stylists: his powers of exposition and atmospheric evocation are greater than ever, he is quite free of jargon or academic lint, and with the possible exception of Newton Arvin there is no American critic living today who can match his mastery of syntax and the long sentence. I suppose it is hopeless to expect the critics-to-be of the graduate schools to consider Wilson as a critic, for they *know* he is a mere impressionist unconcerned with the affective fallacy, the heresy of paraphrase, and the distinction between intent and intention; but they might look into his book to see what a genuine writer can do with the English language.

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